

ROMANELLI, CHRISTINA, Ph.D. *Sacred Heresies: The Harrowing of Hell in Early Modern English Literature*. (2014)
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Sacred Heresies traces the English literary tradition of the Harrowing of Hell out of the Catholic Middle Ages, through the Protestant Renaissance, and into the proto-scientific Restoration period. I argue that Christ's theatrical descent into hell serves as source material for authors wishing to depict characters overcoming evil through confrontation with the devil or demonic figures. Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, and Margaret Cavendish draw on the narratives associated with the Harrowing in order to represent (or question) the lawful or righteous use of magic to combat spiritual, social, and political enemies. The ultimate source for these characterizations and actions is the Jesus Christ of the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, a multi-faceted version of Christ who is rebel, magician, warrior, advocate, and kinfolk simultaneously. The early modern writers who discovered this Christ in their reading of texts like William Langland's *Piers Plowman* and their viewing of the vestiges of the cycle plays found a virtuous subject encountering and often debating with diabolical forces, acts that have previously denoted either witchcraft or exorcism. By offering the Harrowing Christ-figure as a third alternative to these codified subject positions, my project puts scholarship on religious change into conversation with investigations of witchcraft trials and proto-scientific discourse in a way that redefines how we understand magic in early modern England.

Scholarship that connects magic and religion has focused almost exclusively on the negative aspects of the relationship. Stuart Clark observes that accusations of

witchcraft were “endemic in the discourse of religious difference,” and Genevieve Guenther notes that the instrumental aesthetics of conjuring on stage threatened to damn the audience for simply observing events. Given these deleterious associations, any desire to practice magic seems blatantly ludicrous. This study contributes an alternative model for the magical practitioner, a model powerful enough to overcome the damning effects of consorting with Lucifer himself—that of the Harrowing Christ. In the investigation of the motivations for laudable uses of magic in these literary texts, it became clear that magical practice provided a sense of human agency over supernatural events that responded to the lack of agency implied by new Protestant emphases on contemplation and predestination. If as Ian McAdam states, “Radical Protestant internalization of faith placed an almost unbearable burden of responsibility on the believer,” modeling behavior on Christ’s defeat of Satan countered this tendency by empowering the subject to more fully participate in his or her own salvation by confronting damnation directly.

Reading the literary texts alongside Tudor and Stuart theological debates about Christ’s descent into hell unearthed an unexpected element in the trajectory of the reinterpretations of the Harrowing of Hell. Whereas poets, playwrights, and prose writers were crafting characters based on the model of Christ, theologians were fashioning Christ himself for new contexts and audiences. For example, an image published with Adam Hill’s 1592 *The Defence of the Article: Christ descended into Hell* portrays Christ as climbing out of a coffin onto a dragon and a skeleton in order to connect Christ with St George, the patron saint of England. By William Allen’s 1697 sermon titled *A Practical Improvement of the Articles of Christ’s Descent into Hell*, the fact that scientists have the

ability to prove how “the Body of Man becomes that of another” through “successive Transmigration” serves as proof that the infinitely more powerful Christ is “a most intelligent Agent” who can “order and watch the Particles of a Humane Body” in order to raise the dead to everlasting life (D3v). These surprising interpretations of the third article—Christ as nationalistic hero or Christ as scientist extraordinaire—support the claim made by scholars like Dewey Wallace and Patrick Collinson that the English used contested theological positions to separate themselves from both the Catholics and the Puritans and construct a stable identity for the Anglican Church that contributed to the emerging sense of England as a nation-state.

SACRED HERESIES: THE HARROWING OF HELL IN
EARLY MODERN ENGLISH LITERATURE

by

Christina Romanelli

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To my daughters, Mia and Sophia Sebak

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Christina Romanelli has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the context of this dissertation, the Harrowing of Hell refers to a specific narrative that takes a variety of forms in the Middle Ages and continues to be reimagined and reinterpreted in literature into the seventeenth century. This narrative expands the scriptural understanding of Easter weekend by telling the story of what happens between Christ's death and his resurrection on the third day. To briefly summarize, Christ, having recently endured the Passion, descends into hell as a warrior clothed in light to deliver the righteous souls therein to Paradise. In hell, Satan, other demons, and Hades or hell (personified) argue about whether or not they can contain Jesus. Is he their most recent and most exciting spoil, or is he too powerful for them to defeat? Meanwhile, the prophets begin anew to prophecy Christ's coming into hell. He immediately appears, breaks down the gates, binds and delivers Satan to hell, and rescues Adam and the Old Testament prophets from eternal death and delivers them to eternal light. This narrative circulates in a variety of forms in the medieval period. It appears as part of the Apocrypha in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, in the Apostle's Creed, in poems, and in the cycle plays. Before the Reformation, theological understandings of the Harrowing, also known as Christ's descent, and literary representations of this apocryphal event seem to coexist peacefully, but the religious conflict of the sixteenth century makes it impossible to continue to portray this narrative in literature or on the stage unproblematically. For

that reason, scholars have assumed that the literary tradition of the Harrowing of Hell did not continue past the cycle plays. Nonetheless, this dissertation argues that the literary and theological traditions of the Harrowing of Hell not only survive the Reformation into the Renaissance but also help to create a distinctly English sense of the cosmic order and the individual's ability to intervene in that cosmic order.

Though Christ's descent to defeat Satan is creedal and Christian in an international sense, the Harrowing of Hell tradition has a distinctly English character in the medieval and early modern periods. The artistic and theatrical aspects of the Harrowing begin in England, and the formation of the Church of England can, at least in part, be seen through its interpretations of this doctrine. Despite its important role in the history of both English literature and Church of England theology, no extended study of the Harrowing of Hell and English literature has yet been produced. To date, the only monograph that has been written on this tradition is Karl Tamburr's *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England*. Exploring liturgy, visual art, and literature, Tamburr's book covers the Old English renditions of the Harrowing all the way through the sixteenth-century texts, some of which I also discuss in this dissertation. However, Tamburr's conclusion is that Reformation theology makes the Harrowing of Hell "superfluous and easier to dismiss."¹ This study takes up where Tamburr's leaves off by exploring how the Harrowing of Hell became two distinct but interrelated traditions in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Far from being dismissed, the theological aspect of the Harrowing, Christ's descent, was hotly debated throughout the early modern period in

¹ Karl Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), 173.

England. The continued conflicts about the interpretation of this doctrine, which became an Article of Faith in 1563, kept interest in the Harrowing of Hell in the minds of the English people through pamphlet wars and sermons. Though Elizabeth I made it illegal to represent religious issues on stage in 1559, poets and playwrights continued to depict religious stories thematically and allegorically.² Apparently, the Harrowing was simply too interesting and too specifically English to let die with the Reformation.³ The centrality of the narrative to important nation-building texts like Spenser *Faerie Queene* and the continued debates show that it was an important theological and literary element and the exploration thereof can tell us a lot about how the Protestant Reformation occurred in England, how those religious changes affected the discourses of magic and

² For more about Elizabeth's 1559 sanctions of the theater, see Paul Whitfield White, "Patronage, Protestantism, and Stage Propaganda in Early Elizabethan England," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 21 (1991): 39-52. White argues that the 1559 sanctions were rarely enforced and that the plays themselves (the doubling and the stage directions) serve as the greatest evidence of their continued production after 1559. See also Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theater in Renaissance England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), Knapp explains that, "a surprising number of writers throughout the English Renaissance depicted plays as godly enterprises, and that their views had a major impact on the theater. Ignorance of these views, or dismissal of them, has distorted our understanding of Renaissance drama in several crucial ways" (2). See also Ellen MacKay, *Persecution, Plague, and Fire: Fugitive Histories of the Stage in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), and Elizabeth Williamson, *The materiality of religion in early modern English drama* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009). Both Williamson and McKay argue that we overestimate the Protestant Reformers' ability and desire to eradicate the medieval stage practices. I follow these scholars in understanding the relationship between the medieval and the Renaissance stage as being one of continuity rather than wholesale separation. This continuity is especially relevant in regards to religious issues where early modern audiences would have been much more literate in the veiled references to sacraments or cycle plays than our modern critics are.

³ Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England*, 1. Tamburr explains, "Because Christ's triumph was often depicted as a military conquest, in England it was also termed the Harrowing of Hell." Tamburr also notes that the word 'harrow' comes from the Old English verb *hergian*, which means "to harry, rob, spoil." Gary D. Schmidt's *The Iconography of the Mouth of Hell: Eighth-Century Britain to the Fifteenth Century* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1995) also notes the distinctly English character of the tradition: "Though it has ancestors that stretch back to David's Psalms and descendants that stretch forward to the gaping mouth of [Flannery O' Conner's] 'A Good Man is Hard to Find,' the mouth of hell as an anthropomorphic image emerged at a certain time, at a certain place: in Britain, in the artistic light of the tenth-century Monastic Reform" (13).

science, and how Englishmen and women saw themselves and their personal power in relation to these shifting tides.

Examining the Harrowing narrative in these various texts unearths a characterization of Christ that does not seem to appear elsewhere. In the Harrowing of Hell, Christ is both agent and object: he breaks down the gates of hell to rescue the righteous and he is the payment for those souls in the form of an entirely sacrificial death. More importantly, however, his actions completely reconfigure the hierarchical relationships between heaven, hell, and mankind. He changes the law without precedent at the same time that he creates a precedent for all future dealings between humanity and the supernatural realms above and below them. I argue that the texts that depict the Harrowing of Hell characterize Christ as a liminal figure whose agency can best be described as magical, or derived from uncanny powers over supernatural forces, in order to express the confusion about the humanity of Jesus and the role of humanity in the cosmos. Presenting Christ as both human and divine provided a comforting sense of self-definition based on likenesses with Christ and a sense of power over and ability to interact with the supernatural worlds. However, identifying with Christ and the prophets in the Harrowing of Hell raises complex questions about the limits of human agency and whether or not traditionally demonized abilities like prognostication, commanding and binding spirits, healing the sick, and even raising the dead are available to mankind. Thus looking closely at the character of Christ in the Harrowing texts bears upon our definition and our historicization of both religion and magic.

But if this is a story about how unlikely candidates fashioned themselves as Christ when dealing with demons, it is also a story of how Englishmen and women fashioned Christ himself. The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theologians who savored the Harrowing Christ they inherited from medieval texts needed to make him not only Protestant but specifically Anglican in order to embrace fully the doctrine that he descended into hell as something other than a popish relic or a folkloric fantasy. Throughout this dissertation, I argue that the most influential Church of England theologians performed feats of historical contortion by first associating Christ with English heroes like St. George and St. Margaret of Antioch, insisting that the inherited heroes and rites are the fittest heroes and rites. Bringing these heroes out of the Middle Ages and into the early modern period meant replacing swords and militaristic standards and banners with quills and treatises, and the visual depictions of Christ show just how Adam Hill and others depicted a rhetorical Christ rather than a knightly one. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, Christ's skills become not just rhetorical but scientific in a way that subsumes the living Jesus as magician I discuss in Chapter 2 and recreates him as a fully modern entity. This movement from magician to dragon killer to chemist may seem like the natural progress of secularization and modernization, but the readings of these texts do not support this conclusion. The redefinition of Christ for the contemporary times indicates that emerging ideas about magic and science as forms of human agency further supported a religious view of the world. New evidence that came to light during the seventeenth century about chemical processes and foreign worlds across the sea was considered more evidence of God's omnipotence and benevolence,

and, my readings suggest, Englishmen and women should celebrate these new discoveries by giving glory to God for the gift of the miraculous world *and* the gift of creation in his image that allowed them to discover the workings of said miraculous world.

A Harrowing Model

Early modern authors took liberties with the harrowing narrative; they changed the main character—out of necessity—and they often changed the setting. This can make for a great deal of variety in the texts that I argue reimagine the Harrowing, and, indeed, the texts I discuss in this dissertation vary in genre, historical context, and theme. What the texts explored in this dissertation *share* is a central figure who is able to confront and defeat demons by performing harrowing actions. These harrowing actions include breaking down gates and doors; debating with an evil power; binding or otherwise militarily defeating malignant forces; forgiving family and friends; and healing or restoring to life the sick or dead. The harrowing model that I propose is useful for looking at these texts requires looking at representations of lawful magic to test whether or not they depict a harrowing of evil. How a character obtains his or her access to magical power is not as important as how he or she uses it. Once I determined that a character in the text is using magic or magic-like deceit in a sacrificial manner, I continued to examine the elements of the character and the source of the magic. Finally, I reread the texts in the context of the theological arguments taking place near the time of composition; the thematic similarities between the literary texts and the theological

debates indicated that the nexus of issues the harrowing model brings to bear on a literary text yields new insights into the representations of magic in the period. This model changes the interpretation of literature of this period because it draws on and revises the emerging sense of self and concurrent drive to self-negation which I discuss further in the next section.

Several critics have pointed out that the Harrowing is an important context for literary inventiveness in the early modern period, especially in the context of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* discussed in the second chapter.⁴ Most of these have noted the heroic aspects of Jesus and how the narrative helps with what Christopher Bond calls "didactic exemplarity":

Spenser and Milton, in common with almost every other epic poet of the Renaissance, wanted to educate their readers. More specifically, they wanted to make their readers into better Christians...who thought more or less as the poet did on matters such as predestination and Christology. Spenser and Milton, again in common with their poetic precursors, believed that the best way to educate a reader in moral and religious doctrine was to show him or her a character engaged in an action that illustrated the good consequences of following the doctrine and the bad consequences of ignoring it. It was a matter of literary common sense that the more engaging the character and the more entertaining the narrative, the stronger the reader's interest and the more effective the teaching. In short, to get one's theology across, one had first to come up with a good story with convincing heroes. Such a statement of epic *modus operandi* may seem reductive, but it is never wrong and must form the basis for any complete reading of these poems.⁵

⁴ See the discussion in Chapter 3 about Kaske's interpretation of the Harrowing of Hell. Carol V. Kaske, "Introduction" in *The Faerie Queene, Book One* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), xxvii, and see Christopher Bond, "Medieval Harrowings of Hell and Spenser's House of Mammon," *English Literary Renaissance* 37, no. 2 (2007): 175-192, and Matthew Fike, "Britomart and the Descent into Hell," *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 10, no. 4 (1997): 13-18, 13.

⁵ Christopher Bond, *Spenser, Milton, and the redemption of the epic hero* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), (xvii).

It is important to note that here Bond does not refer directly to the Harrowing of Hell, but that he does discuss the Harrowing directly in the context of the epic hero in a discussion of Guyon.⁶ Even without specific reference to the Harrowing, Bond's claim makes a few very relevant assumptions about both the poet and the audience. To assume didacticism, we must also assume a power relationship in which the teacher knows unequivocally what he or she wants to teach and the student is ready and willing to be persuaded through literary representation. While I agree that the poetry cannot be read without reference to the religious contexts of the moment, especially in this time of tremendous religious conflict, I contend that the work of art is a site for working out the tensions and quibbles with theological positions and cultural formations. Thus, for me, Spenser, Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Cavendish are not *teaching* their audiences so much as they are reconfiguring their own understandings of religious concepts and depicting the competing discourses of the period in literary form. Furthermore, the art transcends its historical context to create a new cultural artifact that then influences the understandings of religion and social relations through audience interaction and interpretation. However, Bond's claim that "didactic exemplarity" is the central motivation for artistic creation goes a long way to explain the attitudes of other critics toward the Harrowing Christ. These critics rightly see Christ's behavior in the harrowing as emulable as long as the reader or audience member sees Christ as human like him or herself. "Whereas it would take very little for God to overthrow hell," Matthew Fike explains, "the same action

⁶ Christopher Bond, "Medieval Harrowings of Hell and Spenser's House of Mammon." *English Literary Renaissance* 37, no. 2 (2007): 175-192.

requires a great deal from a human soul and thus signifies the way in which an individual person, with Christ's assistance, can overcome the powers of hell on a personal level."⁷

Interestingly, though critics like Bond, Kaske, and Fike often identify Christ as a model for human behavior, they do not bear this likeness out when it comes to Christ's practicing of magic or dealing with the devil. In the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the apocryphal source of the Harrowing of Hell, Jesus is accused of witchcraft, sentenced to crucifixion, killed, and descends to debate with the devil. In late medieval and early modern England, contacting and contracting with the devil are the very definition of witchcraft.⁸ Furthermore, scholars who do focus on the practice of magic in Renaissance texts do not look to the Harrowing as a source for positive representations of enchanting. I contend this is because we have imposed our modern divisions into the categories of religion, magic, and science on the literature we read. Though we generally agree that early modern Englishmen and women believed that interaction with the supernatural was possible, we assume that people readily distinguished between magical interaction and religious interaction. In doing so, we forget that even ontology is socially constructed, that even educated Renaissance subjects would likely have experienced anxiety about the subtle differences between Christ's dealing with Satan in hell and a witch's pact. Some excellent scholarship on magic has worked to rectify this trend—see Genevieve

⁷ Matthew A. Fike, "Prince Arthur and Christ's Descent into Hell: *The Faerie Queene*, I.viii and II.viii." *ANQ* 12, no.2 (1999): 6-14.

⁸ For more information about witchcraft and this central definition, see James Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Edinburgh Gate: Longman/Pearson, 2001), Marion Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft: Stories of Early English Witches* (New York: Routledge, 1999), Malcolm Gaskill, *Witchfinders: A Seventeenth-Century English Tragedy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-century Representations* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

Guenther's *Magical Imaginations*, Ian McAdam's *Magic and Masculinity in Early Modern English Drama*, and Tobias Doring's and Stephan Clucas's contributions to recent edited collections.⁹ My work follows the work of these critics who see the discourses of magic and religion as interrelated in the period and it offers to these readings the Harrowing as a specific example of a productive relationship between theology and demonology that has not yet been explored. I aim to work towards a historically responsible reading of magical acts in the literature of the period that takes into account both the widely explored contexts of witchcraft and the instances of righteous encounters with the devil in the Apocrypha. An historically responsible view will show us how to contextualize with greater specificity the emerging scientific discourses that we now read as discrediting magic and causing skepticism in a time and place that largely remained committed to religion as the primary mode of accessing the world and creating appropriate social order.

Early modern writers inherited the literal Harrowing of Hell from the medieval literary tradition and they reworked the narrative in interesting and surprising ways to depict powerful magical agents performing righteous work, but the idea of representing ritual as a defense or even an offense against the devil and evil was not new to the Renaissance. In one of the most popular and the most circulated Middle English texts,

⁹ Genevieve Guenther, *Magical Imaginations: Instrumental Aesthetics in the English Renaissance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), Ian McAdam, *Magic and Masculinity in Early Modern English Drama* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2009), Tobias Doring, "Magic, Necromancy, and Performance: Uses of Renaissance Knowledge in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*," in *Magic, Science, Technology, and Literature*, edited by Jarmila Mildorf et al. (Berlin: Lit, 2006), and Stephen Clucas, "'Wondrous force and operation': magic, science, and religion in the Renaissance" in *Textures of Renaissance Knowledge*, edited by Philippa Berry and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton (England: Manchester University Press, 2003).

Geoffrey Chaucer's pilgrims show that the performance of ritual can help to combat malignant forces and is not limited to the clergy. In *The Miller's Tale*, for example, John the carpenter, performs a mini-harrowing when he breaks down the door to Nicholas's room with Robin's help. John finds Nicholas on the floor immobile and cries out:

‘What! Nicholay! What, how! What, look adoun!
Awak, and thenk on Cristes passioun!
I crouche thee from elves and fro wightes.’
Therwith the nyght-spel seyde he anon-rightes
On foure halves of the hous aboute,
And on the thresshold of the dore withoute:
‘Jhesu Crist and Seinte Benedight,
Blesse this hous from every wikked wight,
For nyghtes verye, the white *pater-noster*!’¹⁰

In the act of breaking down a door (“Get me a staf, that I may underspore”) and discovering evil within, John draws from the tradition of the Harrowing of Hell to save his friend. He hopes that thinking on Christ's Passion will help Nicholas come out of his evil state, but John is even more proactive in his defense of his house. He performs ritual actions to keep evil at bay. He makes the sign of the cross and says the night prayer to keep evil outside the house. He calls on Jesus and Saint Benedict to bless the house and overthrow whatever evil might be within. Though John is considered an overly superstitious character who is too gullible about the presence of evil around him, in this case, Nicholas is actually scheming against him to seduce his wife.

¹⁰ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Miller's Tale* in *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2008, lines 3477-3485.

In *The Friar's Tale*, another lay person is presented as having the agency to confront evil directly. Chaucer's Mabely, a widow living in the woods, damns a wicked summoner to hell because he tries to extort money and her frying pan from her. The context of this action is very similar to that of *Doctor Faustus* discussed in Chapter 4; a summoner wants to travel with a demon to practice their wicked arts together but finds that the powers of evil only work within the scheme of God's cosmic organization. "We been Goddes instrumentz," says the demon disguised as a summoner.¹¹ Because the demons work only within the power of God, the widow Mabely finds herself in a position to command the demon to take the wicked summoner to hell: "Unto the devel blak and rough of jewe Yeve I thy body and my panne also!"¹² After making sure this was her "wyl in earnest," the demon takes the Summoner and the pan. In these ways, there is a transfer of agency through religious ritual from the clergy to the parishioners that does not occur necessarily through affiliation with heterodox groups or even increased literacy but through modeling behavior and repeating rituals seen in church or in the narratives of Christ's life. Though many of these rituals may also be considered folk traditions passed down from pre-Christian history, the Harrowing of Hell texts show that arguing with the devil and reconfiguring the relationships in the cosmic order are also available through a purely Christian tradition that condones human agency in the face of demonic powers, even amongst the laity.

¹¹ Chaucer, *The Friar's Tale*, 1483.

¹² Ibid, 1622-1623.

As an example of supernatural agency that continues into the seventeenth century, the Harrowing of Hell narrative specifically opens up the act of dealing with demons and evil to moral and ontological scrutiny. Medieval and early modern audiences could imagine themselves as Christ defeating evil and Satan. Though the most assured way of identifying and convicting a witch was a confession of “trafficking with demons,” the Harrowing of Hell tradition shows that there was a model for doing this successfully. This connection between Christ’s life after death and later condemnations of witchcraft does not mean that every witch modeled himself or herself after Christ, but it does mean that expressions of “lawful magic” or attempts to defeat the devil at his own game must be read in this new context in order to understand the multiple possible valences of magic in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. If magic, ritual, and superstition are not automatically perceived as negative in the period, we need to reevaluate our understanding of how we interpret characters who use magic, the effects of the Protestant Reformation on fiction, and especially the secularization we assume accompanies this shift in religious sensibilities. What it means to be a Protestant Englishman or a recusant, a moral subject or an immoral or heretical one changes if these categories are interrogated. *Sacred Heresies* analyzes the performance of magic and ritual in several Renaissance texts in order to show how the lens of the Harrowing tradition historicizes epistemologies and opens up the categories of religion, magic, and science, which in turn affect our understanding of the early modern subject. When we view religion, science, and magic as interdependent upon one another, we can see how individuals fashioned

themselves as fundamentally faithful and intellectual people capable of believing in science as miracle.

Ritualization, Affective Piety, and Supernatural Agency

A major claim that undergirds the readings in this dissertation is that our understanding of early modern subjectivity rests largely upon a harmful value judgment between thought and action. In this section, I look at ritual as a corrective to that distinction and attempt to demonstrate how a better understanding of ritual in the late medieval and early modern periods contributes to a sense of what I call supernatural agency, or the subject's sense of empowerment over his or her interaction with the metaphysical world, especially the sense that one has control over his or her fate in the afterlife. Though there is not sufficient space in this project to do a complete overview of the literature on early modern subjectivity, I refer to a few landmark studies here to show how the subject emerges from participation in ritual action.¹³ In order to ground my understanding of how supernatural agency works in this particular historical context, I spend the rest of this section looking at how affective piety encouraged a kind of self-fashioning that continued into the Renaissance. The understanding of the self that is

¹³ For a more complete understanding of subjectivity in the early modern period, please see the following texts: Michael Schoenfeldt's *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Jonathan Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*. 3rd Ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2010), Catherine Belsey's *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity & Difference in Renaissance Drama* (New York: Methuen, Inc., 1985), Cynthia Marshall's *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), and Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

modeled on Christ's behavior in the Harrowing complicates Stephen Greenblatt's seminal work on self-fashioning in the period because it works against a whole and complete subject in the division of Christ between agent and object. This work also responds to scholarship that indicates that self-immolation was negating response to the whole humanist subject by arguing that this division and circulation of self was a source of agency.

The Protestant Reformation engendered an intense need to read religious behavior and to make religious affiliation legible through the participation in rituals.¹⁴ Ritual is any emulable act that aligns an individual with a larger cosmic or social order and performs the individual's place in that larger cosmic or social order. Even the iconoclasm of the staunchly Protestant English subjects can be seen as a ritual in the sense that it alters the social relations between parties and depends upon the model of a ritual master, like Calvin. Thus even as Claire McEachern and Peter White indicate the centrality of the conflict over predestination discussed further below, religious conformity depended as much on action as it did on thought. Furthermore participation in ritual is an empowering way of defining the self and one's role in society; however, our understanding of thought as ontologically better than action colors our ability to see the positive aspects of these

¹⁴ For more on how the English Protestants worked to create a sense of visual and physical culture after the loss of Catholic rituals, see Huston Diehl *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), Diehl argues for a distinctly Protestant aesthetics that represents the religious beliefs of the emerging Church of England, Claire McEachern, *The poetics of English nationhood, 1590-1612* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and "Why Do Cuckolds Have Horns?" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 71, no.4 (2008): 607-631, McEachern argues that "in the wake of the Reformation, questions about salvation [and how to prove it] were present not only for Puritans but also for more easygoing species of Protestants and even (as ever) for Catholics" (614), and Jennifer Rust, "Image of Idolatryes": Iconotropy and the Theo-Political Body in "The Faerie Queene." *Religion & literature* (2006): 137-155.

actions. Catherine Bell describes the problem as a problem of scholarship rather than a real world problem:

Theoretical descriptions of ritual generally regard it as action and thus automatically distinguish it from the conceptual aspects of religion, such as beliefs, symbols, and myths. In some cases added qualifications may soften the distinction, but rarely to such descriptions question this immediate differentiation or the usefulness of distinguishing what is thought from what is done...Ritual is then described as particularly *thoughtless* action—routinized, habitual, obsessive, or mimetic—and therefore the purely formal, secondary, and mere physical expression of logically prior ideas.¹⁵

The discussions of the Harrowing of Hell that occur in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including the opinions of people as well-known as Martin Luther (discussed further below), indicate that questioning can often get in the way of appropriate religious practice and that faithful, thoughtful action is often more necessary than an empirical understanding of the cosmic order. Throughout this dissertation, I follow Bell in arguing that ritual fuses thought and action in productive ways: “ritual is both activity and the fusion of thought and activity.”¹⁶ Bell also argues that ritual is a process of changing social situations rather than a single, stable action. Ritual is:

an internalization of schemes with which [participants] are capable of reinterpreting reality in such a way as to afford perceptions and experiences of a redemptive hegemonic order. Ritualization always aligns one within a series of relationships linked to the ultimate sources of power.¹⁷

¹⁵ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 19.

¹⁶ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 31.

¹⁷ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 141.

In other words, the practice of ritualization endows agents with the power to recreate the cosmic order, or at least with the ability to perceive their place in the cosmic order differently. The ways in which anti-witchcraft sentiment and the widely-researched witch hunts reinscribed the general misogyny of the age has been discussed at length.¹⁸ Rarely have we considered how participation in ritual, especially ritual that can be read as magical practice, creates a sense of agency in the participant. Modeling behavior on Christ's actions in his descent into hell provides the subject with a sense of agency over corrupt spiritual powers in a religious culture that is increasingly leaving the subject without any agency in his or her own salvation. The ability to model one's self on Christ depends on the ability to understand Christ's subjectivity as mortal or the human subject as partly divine.

In her discussion of sorcery and subjectivity, Katharine Eisaman Maus discusses the "highly unsystematic and inexplicit" philosophies of the self offered in Renaissance texts.¹⁹ She suggests that early modern belief in or skepticism of magic is related to how the subject viewed the self as either more or less permeable, with skeptics conceiving of the self as largely autonomous and impermeable and the believers regarding the self as variously permeable and open to physical, mental, and spiritual penetration. There is, of course, an implied value judgment in Maus's comments. Modern people see themselves as whole and generally protected from outside interference; some early modern people

¹⁸ See note 8 for more information on witchcraft and misogyny, especially Dianne Purkiss and James Sharpe.

¹⁹ Katharine Eisaman Maus, "Sorcery and Subjectivity in Early Modern Discourses of Witchcraft" in *Historicism, Psychoanalysis, and Early Modern Culture*, edited by Carla Mazzio and Douglas Trevor. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 325-48, 325.

saw the self as open to invasion or attack. Thus, we are to infer that the early modern people who do not see themselves as we see ourselves are somehow more primitive, less intelligent or rational than we are. This implicit conclusion is made more clearly in her statement about magical belief in the twenty-first century. She writes, “Although plenty of people nowadays believe in the possibility of witchcraft, the efficacy of exorcism, and the power of magical rituals, few of them teach humanities in North American or Western European universities.”²⁰ She notes, but does not tease out, the relationship between these elucidations of magic and religious ritual: “By those who believe in its efficacy, magic is imagined as a blasphemous parody of religious ritual.”²¹ The idea that magical practice and religious ritual are aligned in Renaissance texts is important because they are two sides of the same coin, that of supernatural agency. Regardless of whether the Renaissance subject believed the self was porous and permeable or autonomous and at the mercy of the unruly effects of the matter within, the vast majority of them maintained that Christ was both man and god and that he effected change in the material world through his actions. This may be because of the threat of the charge of atheism that Maus points out was leveled at skeptics like Reginald Scot, but it was nonetheless a contradiction that had to be reconciled continually in the post-Reformation era when acceptance of certain magic or ritual could lead one to be considered a Catholic sympathizer and the eschewal of all of it registered one as atheist. Maus explains that the

²⁰ Ibid, 328.

²¹ Ibid, 333.

belief in witchcraft and our modern understanding of psychoanalysis share an emphasis on external contributions to identity construction:

Like witchcraft belief, too, psychoanalysis construes the individual as an entity who is made, or who makes himself, largely by invasions or internalizations of the external world: the idealized mother, the punitive father, the good or bad breast, and so on.²²

The tradition of affective piety supports an understanding of pre- and early modern identity construction based on external images and narratives of the life of Christ. Rather than assuming that all early modern subjects who believed in witchcraft saw themselves as vulnerable to assault from external forces, it seems reasonable to assume that these subjects also considered themselves bolstered by external narratives of goodness and saw their action as guided by the forms of supernatural agency available to them in religious stories and doctrines of their own culture. My interest in early modern conceptions of the self centers around this contradiction inherent in religious belief that questions or even demonizes the practice of magic, and it is at least partially answered by an understanding of ritual as a process of social change. In other words, the concept of the self as part of a supernatural and social order depends upon the belief that the supernatural world intervenes in the mundane world *and* that the mundane world can affect the supernatural world in some way. The way in which that intervention occurs is ritual, and scholarship has provided two contradictory ways of seeing early modern ritual and its effect on

²² Ibid, 342.

subjectivity: religious practice and witchcraft. This study interrogates the similarities between those rituals to look for previously unidentified models of subject formation.

Since self-definition and understanding is not always or perhaps ever a philosophical endeavor, it is important to recognize how the reading of literature or the viewing of plays becomes a part of that process. Both in the tradition of affective piety and in the act of watching plays on the stage, the subject forms itself through a process of viewing, internalizing, imagining, and acting. As Wilson aptly points out:

The self's sense of itself as an agent, in my view, has less to do with epistemological certainty than with a practical familiarity with an image of oneself actually acting; it is acting as praxis, rather than a theoretical capability of knowing when or why to act, that is in question.²³

If subjectivity can be considered a praxis and it does not require overly complex conceptions of the world, self-fashioning must be a widely-available method of participating in social structures. In this way it may be profitably considered a ritualization in and of itself. The remainder of this section discusses how affective piety serves exactly the purpose of giving the audience a sense of itself as an agent in supernatural affairs and how this translates into the literature of the early modern period.

The cycle plays are an important site for seeing how this transference works. When the York saddler playing Jesus first appears on stage before descending and defeating hell, he says,

²³ Luke Wilson, *Theaters of Intention: Drama and the Law in Early Modern England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 14

Man on mould, be meek to me,
And have thy maker in thy mind,
And think how I have tholed for thee,
With peerless pains for to be pined. (1-4)²⁴

Jesus's words ask for a particular kind of invisible action from his audience. The men on earth are to listen and pay attention to his actions while fixing their creator in their minds. "Think" he demands, insisting that the appropriate method for experiencing the narrative of his life is through meditation. In addition to considering their creation, the audience members are encouraged to focus on the pain and suffering Jesus endured for their sake. This request would have been familiar to the late medieval audience because mystics like Richard Rolle and Julian of Norwich modeled this meditation on Christ's life in a practice now called affective piety. Though affective piety is generally associated with meditation specifically on the Passion of Christ and is therefore aided by texts describing Christ's suffering and death on the cross, another set of texts temporally related to the Passion—those on the Harrowing of Hell—invite consideration not on Christ's death but on his life after death. The Harrowing texts derived from the *Gospel of Nicodemus* depict a powerful Christ who performs magic and miracles and defeats Satan by fighting with the fiend's own weapons. This characterization of Christ opens up an interesting space in the tradition of affective piety, a proactive space that invites readers and audience members to imagine defeating evil in direct confrontation. Unlike the tears and remorse expected from meditation on the Passion, meditation on the Harrowing was likely to

²⁴ Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King, *York Mystery Plays: A Selection in Modern Spelling* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 238.

excite and invigorate audience members. Thus affective piety begins with meditation and received narrative but engenders a proactive rewriting and ritualizing.

While there was not an instruction manual for affective piety in the Middle Ages, scholars use the term to group together a set of mental, emotional, and physical practices encouraged by various groups in the twelfth through fifteenth centuries. Affective piety involves meditating on and mentally rewriting the narrative of Christ's life to include the self. Traditionally, the study of this focus on meditation and Christ's life has centered on clerical and mystical writings.²⁵ The meditator/believer fixes his or her mind on an aspect of Christ's life and makes vivid in the mind through creating details and imagining his or her own presence at the scene.²⁶ Thus the use of imagination in revising Christ's story to include the meditator was for the purpose of inspiring believers to have emotional responses to Christ's life and more fully repent sins. Like all religious rituals turned over to the populace, however, affective piety could be repurposed for the needs or desires of individual believers.

Critics have recently discussed affective piety in terms of its relation to cycle plays, which, like the Harrowing narratives, are not traditionally considered works of

²⁵ Patrick Grant, "Augustinian Spirituality and the Holy Sonnets of John Donne." *English Literary History* 38 no.4 (1971): 542-561. Grant describes affective piety as "Augustinian spirituality," and explains that it is a "composition of place through imaginative application of the senses" and requires that "authors picture themselves actually present at the crucifixion" (544). He emphasizes the imaginative and creative qualities of affective piety.

²⁶ Raymond A Powell, "Margery Kempe: An Exemplar of Late Medieval English Piety." *The Catholic Historical Review* 89, no.1 (2003): 1-23, Focusing on the work of Margery Kempe, Powell agrees that the most important feature of affective piety is imagination: "The significant aspect of this form of spirituality was the encouragement to draw on the resources of the imagination to facilitate devotional practice" (4). He insists, "The goal, then, was for the one meditating to insert himself or herself into the story, as a witness or even a character, and to follow the action...to heighten the emotional impact of the images on the heart, and it was for this reason that the practice was enjoined upon pious laypeople as an aid to further devotion" (6-7).

affective piety.²⁷ In the context of the cycle plays, the audience members more fully experience the narrative even if they lack imagination because staged performances create many aids to imagination, including a script, actors, sets, and props. This collaborative aspect of the theater also increases the number of people with an investment in the narrative.²⁸ In this view, because all the individual believers join together to create the affect experience, the cycle plays become another form of pious worship.²⁹ These critics emphasize the participatory nature of affective piety when it is staged: it allows the audience to feel involved emotionally and physically in the narrative of Christ's life.

Affective piety on the stage only further multiplies the interpretive possibilities for identification with biblical characters. Instead of just being a witness, someone was Mary, someone was Jesus. The stage is one way the narrative of Christ's life becomes the purview of all the people and not just the clergy. Though some critics see the cycle plays and the Harrowing of Hell specifically as a method for control, identification is an opportunity for agency. John S. Howard states, "The [Harrowing of Hell] play, however, within its limited origination as church extension, reaffirms the authority of the church by limiting the authority of the individual. The collective is privileged over and against the

²⁷ Cami D. Agan, "The Platea in the York and Wakefield Cycles: Avenues for Liminality and Salvation." *Studies in Philology* 94, no.3 (1997) 344-367. In her discussion of the platea as a stage space, Cami Agan writes, "As in affective piety, the audience enters into the present tense of the birth of Christ, so that they may lead a more Christian life of their own present" (357).

²⁸ Ruth Nisse, *Defining Acts: Drama and the Politics of Interpretation in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press), 2005, Nisse argues, "Mystery plays invite the audience to imagine themselves as eyewitnesses of biblical narrative and to empathize with the sufferings of all the figures in the Passion" (12).

²⁹ Robert S. Sturges, "Spectacle and Self-Knowledge: The Authority of the Audience in the Mystery Plays." *South Central Review* 9, no.2 (1992): 27-48, Sturges contends that the goal of affective piety was "imaginative identification with Christ, specifically with his sufferings on the cross" (41). He emphasizes that affective piety "required that men and women take responsibility both for Christ's death and, through an imaginative identification with his sacrifice, for their own salvation" (41).

individual, so that, indeed, an individual consciousness exists in the play only as rebellion.”³⁰ I argue that this ignores the process through which the narratives are removed from the church and put into the hands of the laity.³¹ Inserting oneself into the narrative gives the medieval subject a sense of agency in the spiritual world and the outcome of their individual journey toward redemption and bliss.³² The translation of scriptural knowledge into individualized meditative narratives and cycle plays performed by the laity opens them up to multiple readings of Christ’s life. Narrative works of Christ’s life, then, were open to a variety of interpretive possibilities by all medieval subjects. This meditation creates a space for agency in which the medieval believer can rewrite the narrative of Christ’s life to include him or herself and change the outcome to show his or her own defeat of Satan and evil.

³⁰ John S. Howard, “Dialectic and Spectacle in the Harrowing of Hell.” *Essays in Literature* 21 (1994): 3-13, 9.

³¹ See Arthur F. Marotti, *Religious Ideology & Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005). This movement of agency from Christ to the priests and from the priests to the parishioners complicates our understanding of the Protestant Reformation as the empowering movement and recusancy as nostalgia for an older, simpler order. I follow Arthur Marotti who writes, “I am writing against the grain of most historical and literary interpretation—which has operated, more or less, on the liberal, Whiggish assumption that (early modern and modern) Catholicism is an antidemocratic, antiprogressive force in world history, an attitude that, therefore, impedes a sympathetic understanding of English Catholic culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.” (5). I would extend the inability to English Catholic culture of the Late Middle Ages as well. It is important to note, however, that the widespread focus on literacy that began with Lollardy and the Protestant Reformation is an important site for religious agency as well. Both the Catholic traditions and rituals and increasing literacy are constitutive of the English subject; it is unwise to privilege one at the expense of the other, not just because it hinders our ability to historicize appropriately but because it gives an unrealistic view of the trajectory of the enlightened subject. These religious and cultural movements worked in tandem, not peacefully, but together to create an increasing sense of widespread, religious agency in the Renaissance.

³² Agan, “The Platea in the York and Wakefield Cycles,” Agan discusses agency in the cycle plays in terms of audience participation: “When the platea is in use, the audience may be allowed to move from mere spectator to full participant far more easily” (347). Sturges, “Spectacle and Self-Knowledge,” Sturges concurs with Agan’s interpretation of the audience’s role as central and powerful: “The performers really were one with the audience, ordinary citizens along with the spectators, recruited from the same group of townspeople and ultimately returning to it...The audience here literally produces the play” (40).

Our standard readings of Christ's life shape not only medieval but current interpretations of the Harrowing of Hell and the possibly agency of individuals. Only by divorcing the details in the narrative from the cultural baggage surrounding our staid view of Christ can we see honor epistemologies based not on literacy and reading but on modeling and repeated actions. We must see Christ as both agent and object in order to see how medieval and early modern subjects performed rituals that gave them the power to change mundane and supernatural situations. The popularity of this affective piety shows that medieval audiences wanted to participate in the narrative and in the drama.³³ It may be said that affective piety was so popular that the medieval believer went from reading and learning about Christ's life for the purpose of meditation to embodying Christ's narrative on the stage. When believers are encouraged to revise the familiar narrative of Christ's life to include different characters and extensive details, affective piety becomes a form of authorship. In some cases this authorship could be highly individualized. In the case of Margery Kempe, an entire pseudo-hagiography is written

³³ Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages." *Church History* 71, no.4 (2002): 685-714, Conversations about affective piety often feature arguments about the orthodoxy or heretical nature of this meditative practice. Certainly witchcraft and magic are discussed as heretical issues; however, heresy in the Late Middle Ages seems dependent upon circumstance. Though Caroline Walker Bynum does not support the use of the term "affective piety," referring instead to "so-called affective piety" that emerges in the eleventh century, in her argument about "blood piety," she discusses the issue of orthodoxy versus heresy. "As increasing demands for the chalice indicate," she insists, "the efforts of clerical authority to limit blood cult were understood as an assertion of clerical control, a move against the people's access...Nevertheless, many Christians, supported by clergy (including bishops, friars, and even popes), cried out for a more physical, a more labile and multivalent presence" (699). Laquita Higgs, "Richard Rolle and His Concern for 'Even Christians'," *Mystics Quarterly* 14 no.4 (1988): 177-185, also addresses the issue of clergy versus laity in affective piety: "Rolle's emphasis was upon Christ and the individual's direct relationship to Him, an approach which could have heretical implications, and certainly the later Lollards were fond of some of Rolle's writings. Rolle's independent thinking was not meant to be unorthodox, however; one points of dogma his orthodoxy was unimpeachable. He did not express anti-church sentiment, though in his Latin writings, particularly the early ones, he was certainly critical of some of the personnel of the Church" (180).

from her affective religious experiences.³⁴ Some of these responses were perhaps typical: pity for Christ's suffering, for example. Feelings of remorse and guilt for sins committed are also common features of texts resulting from affective experiences. Meditation on the Harrowing texts seems likely to have brought about a very different response.

Nonetheless, despite the fact that affective piety was encouraged by officials of the church and the community, the potential for revision multiplies the interpretive possibilities for Christ's life. This is not to say that medieval subjects consciously repurposed the narratives of Christ's life for their own benefit, but even though the practice of affective piety was not in any way restricted by the Catholic Church, the Church ended up with very little control over the possible meanings gleaned from affective experiences, whether meditated upon in solitude or performed on the stage.

The Renaissance sees a movement from affective piety to supernatural agency. Supernatural agency has been discussed in two distinct ways in the scholarship, and my use of the term is slightly different than both. Though the term "self-fashioning" is derived from Greenblatt's book of the same title, he uses the term "supernatural agency" in *Hamlet in Purgatory* to denote supernatural interference in the mundane world.

According to Greenblatt, the compulsion to remember the dead that was implied by belief in purgatory, "was difficult for Renaissance theorists of memory to explain naturalistically, that is, without recourse to a notion of supernatural agency."³⁵ On the one hand, Greenblatt sees supernatural agency as the agency of supernatural entities to effect

³⁴ Higgs, "Richard Rolle and His Concern for 'Even Christians'", notes, "Works of affective piety...stressed an individual's interior response to God" (177).

³⁵ Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 214.

change in and on individuals in the “real” world. On the other hand, supernatural agency means something quite different for Diane Purkiss. In *The Witch in History*, she writes, “As recollection of an English Catholic church waned and the materials of popular worship were increasingly in the hands of ordinary people, without any institutional support, one of the aspects of the pre-Reformation Catholic church which survived best was its power to give supernatural agency to the believer.”³⁶ For Purkiss, supernatural agency is the power of the individual to intervene in the supernatural world. Interestingly, both of these texts deal with the loss of agency implied by the Reformation removal of ritual practice and *not* specifically with subjectivity in the period; however, both writers indicate elsewhere that the self is constructed from culturally available narratives. Greenblatt argues that Christ is “the recurrent model” for “a distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving.”³⁷ However, he qualifies this statement by describing all the self-fashioned individuals as consciously submitting to “an absolute power or authority situated at least partially *outside the self*—God, a sacred book, an institution such as church, court, colonial or military institution.”³⁸ What makes Christ such an interesting model for the self for the purposes of this study is not his submission—though that can certainly be argued in a different context—but his near limitless power over both the natural and the supernatural world. Modeling one’s behavior on Christ when dealing with demons and spirits meant something very different than performing humility in social situations. Purkiss describes

³⁶ Purkiss, *The witch in history: early modern and twentieth-century representations*, 154.

³⁷ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 2.

³⁸ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 9 (emphasis mine).

witches as “women who scripted their own stories;” their agency “is visible as a process of rewriting cultural materials.” For these women who are writing their own lives, “one might lose control of the self-fashioning process with disastrous results.”³⁹ Fiction, of course, gives writers the possibility to write different lives and explore their own supernatural agency and ritualization without the devastating effects.

When I use the term supernatural agency in this dissertation, I mean the ability of the individual believer to effect the outcome of his or her own life and to perform that ability as evidence of his or her righteousness in this life. Writers depict supernatural agency by creating characters who are agents because they, to varying degrees, control their own relationships with religion and their fate in the afterlife. Because writing these narratives contributes to the cultural understanding of the practice of religion and the conception of the cosmic and social order, authorship is itself a form of supernatural agency that allows these authors to rewrite the Harrowing of Hell in ways that give themselves more power over their salvation.

Supernatural agency is created through depicting the ritualization of Christ’s power to the priests in the mass and extended to the people in the performance of the cycle plays and through the practice of affective piety. The ritualization allows for a dispersal of power. Agency is dispersed through narrative revision and the organization of institutions. Christ’s power moves to priests through ritualization. The Protestant Reformation forces similar dispersal with the elimination of the physical evidence of

³⁹ Purkiss, *The witch in history*, 162, 169, 161-162.

Catholic Church practices.⁴⁰ These priests gave the candlesticks, vestments, and chalices to the parishioners to hide in their houses. If, as medieval and early modern believers certainly would, we see the power of these objects and the rituals performed with them as real, we have a literal representation of ritualization working toward democratization. Ritualization occurs similarly in the Harrowing of Hell narratives, but instead of physical objects changing hands, harrowing actions are emulated. If the cycle plays and other Harrowing texts open up potentialities of lay interpretation of theological issues, the Protestant Reformation may be seen as a response to the proliferation of ideological positions opened up by the late medieval democratization of religion.

History of the Harrowing of Hell

Lollardy and the Wyclifite movement have been described as proto-Protestant, and for that reason, it is easy to forget that the beliefs of these groups were not the dominant religious views of the Middle Ages. Of Lollardy and Wyclifitism, Sturges reminds us:

It should be recalled, however, that Wyclif's followers were not in the mainstream of Christian thought, especially not in their condemnation of images, and that religious ritual itself, the embodiment of ultimate reality, is also discontinuous with everyday life...Ample evidence has been gathered to demonstrate that the orthodox church favored images, including dramatic ones, and even that the

⁴⁰ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400-c.1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), Duffy recounts how the priests literally dispersed the materials necessary for ritual to the believers in the congregation for safe-keeping: "Attempts to prevent the destruction of images and ornaments were certainly very widespread. At Morebath, for example, the missal and Mass vestments were entrusted once more to parishioners" (570).

Franciscans had by the period the mystery cycles evolved a theory of vision (and the other senses) that...included drama as a potential tool for union with God.⁴¹

It is of the utmost importance to remember that, at least in England, extreme iconoclasm and Puritanism was not mainstream until at least the Civil Wars, and even then, only temporarily. As my examination of the history of the Harrowing through the Restoration indicates, images, stories, plays, and poems were valued aspects of theological understanding for a great deal of the population. If we have tended to oversimplify the iconoclasm of the late medieval period, then we certainly carry this tendency over into Renaissance studies of the Protestant Reformation in England. In his study of the Reformation, Patrick Collinson only half-jokingly states, "There is a myth about the English Reformation, and the myth is that it never happened," that at best it was "little more than a few moderate and sensible adjustments" to the inherited Catholicism of the Middle Ages.⁴² Of course this is an amusing oversimplification of the issue; however, scholarship seems to have chronically given itself over to what Christopher Haigh has called "Whiggish history," or a history that "concentrates on the achievement of progress: the defeat of superstition, obscurantism, and regimentation; the victory of realism, rationalism, and freedom."⁴³ This extended study of a single aspect of medieval Catholic culture's continuation into the English Renaissance finds that in poetry, in theater, and in theological debate, the Harrowing of Hell helped to form the Church of England and its identifiable differences from both Catholicism and extreme Protestantism. The research

⁴¹ Sturges, "Spectacle and Self-Knowledge," 40-41.

⁴² Patrick Collinson, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: The Modern Library, 2006), 126.

⁴³ Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 15.

indicates that we should do as Knapp suggests and “credit the established church with...cultural capital of its own” because Church of England theologians vociferously refused to follow blindly the Catholicism of their past *or* the dictates of Martin Luther or Jean Calvin.⁴⁴

Oversimplifying the Protestant cause by collapsing distinctions between the wide variety of possible Protestant positions can be extremely detrimental to the understanding of the Harrowing of Hell in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and acknowledging the multiple religious worldviews requires investigating the conflict that bringing this medieval doctrine into the Church of England engendered. In fact, the Edwardian reforms of 1553, the Article of Faith “He descended into hell” was left out of the Forty-two Articles completely. This omission was, at least in part, the result of a logical conflict between the doctrine of predestination and the descent. Predestination was a tremendously debatable topic throughout the Reformation in England, and the conflict between the third article and the seventeenth article stands out starkly in our understanding of the Harrowing because the narrative of Christ descending into hell to save the patriarchs from eternal damnation cannot be made to fit logically with the understanding of predestination.⁴⁵ The third article reads “As Christ died for us, and was

⁴⁴ Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe*, 8.

⁴⁵ For more information about predestination theology in England, see Peter White's excellent monograph *Predestination, policy and polemic: Conflict and consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1992). White stresses that though there was a tremendous amount of debate over the doctrine, “all parties to the theological debate accepted the doctrine of predestination” (13). For this reason, the conflict about the third article discussed in this dissertation centers around making it fit with rather than replacing a doctrine of predestination.

buried, so also is it to be believed, that he went down into hell.”⁴⁶ The seventeenth article reads:

As the godly consideration of Predestination, and our Election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal Salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God: So, for curious and carnal persons, lack the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God’s Predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the Devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchlessness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation.⁴⁷

If “godly persons” feel their election continuously and curiosity and interest in fleshly action is a “most dangerous downfall” leading to temptation by Satan, surely God did not allow any “godly persons” in hell and the mere fact that one is in hell is a sign of reprobation. Furthermore, the third article is maddeningly without any explanation, and therefore is much more debatable than the seventeenth. The theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ironed out this ambiguity by virtually universally agreeing that Christ’s descent was not a matter of rescuing or retrieving souls, a fact which puts the theological tradition at odds with the literary one. However, their myriad interpretations of the importance and purpose of the descent provided a wealth of theatrical and literary possibilities for the writers of the period to join with the literary tradition inherited from the Middle Ages. Whether the literature influenced the theological debate or the

⁴⁶ David Cressy and Lori Anne Ferrell, *Religion and Society in Early Modern England: A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 70.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 73-74.

theological debate influenced the literature, we may never know, but the similarity of themes between the debates and the literature produced around the same time period is striking and indicates that the understanding of the Harrowing of Hell in the early modern period was jointly produced by the discourses of art, theology, magic, and science.

Though Protestant theology eventually agreed upon a figurative meaning for Christ's descent or at least agreed not to debate it further, the literal meaning stubbornly persisted because it emphasized an active and powerful Christ that was more versatile, comforting, and dramatic than the inscrutable object that died for human sins. Dewey D. Wallace explains that the arguments about Christ's descent into hell mark "an early hesitant step in the path toward a distinctly Anglican theology different from the theology of Puritanism."⁴⁸ In order to understand these intra-Protestant debates, it is important to note that the English did not automatically define themselves against the Catholics or the Jews. Rather, complex historical conditions contributed to the willingness or unwillingness to accept or eschew a particular Catholic doctrine. Wallace argues, "a group of conformist and anti-Puritan English theologians at the end of Elizabeth's reign sought to maximize their theological differences from Puritanism where they could find such differences and reverted to a more traditional, perhaps patristically inspired spiritual ethos."⁴⁹ Depending upon political and social circumstances in any given year or decade, identifying with the medieval Catholicism might be preferable to identifying with the Puritans or other continental Protestants.

⁴⁸ Dewey D. Wallace, "Puritan and Anglican: The Interpretation of Christ's Descent into Hell in Elizabethan Theology." *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 69 (1978): 248-86, 286.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 285.

As in its ability to escape the association with Lollardy or other heretical movements in the Middle Ages, the Harrowing of Hell proved complex enough to avoid consistent labeling as Catholic, Jewish, Puritan, or Arminian. One major point of contention over Christ's descent as it was explored in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is whether or not Christ was literally in hell and what he did there. While it has been assumed that Calvin and Luther both individualize and personalize the Harrowing of Hell, interpreting the scriptural references to mean that Christ will descend into the human soul and root out sin, a closer reading of their opinions on the matter indicate otherwise. Luther argues that Christ's descent into hell must be understood at the level of image rather than questioned and analyzed *ad infinitum*. In his "Torgau Sermon on Christ's descent into hell and the resurrection, Luther states:

The customary way of depicting how Christ descended into hell on church walls represents him with a cape and with banners in his hand as he makes his descent and stalks and assaults the devil, as he storms hell and rescues his own people from it. The children's play presented at Easter depicts it in a similar way. It seems better to me that you depict, act out, sing, and recite the story in a very simple way and let it remain at that and not concern yourself with sublime and precise ideas about how it actually took place. For it did not happen in a physical manner, since he indeed remained three days in the grave... For such paintings show well how powerful and useful this article is, why it took place, why it is to be preached and believed that Christ destroyed hell's power and took all his power away from the devil. When I have that, then I have the true core and meaning of this article of faith, and I should not ask further nor rack my brain about just how it happened or how it was possible—just as I should not rack my brain in regard to other articles of faith. Mastering such things with reason is forbidden and cannot attain anything.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Martin Luther, "Martin Luther's Torgau Sermon on Christ's Descent into Hell and the Resurrection: The Third Sermon on Easter Day." Trans. Robert Kolb. in *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord*. Eds. Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001), 246-247.

From this brief excerpt we can tell many things about Luther's understanding of the line in the Apostle's Creed. Perhaps most important for our purposes is that the article is indeed "powerful and useful," but "it did not happen in a physical manner." Luther refuses to explain what the descent means or when or how it happened, but he also refuses to eschew it as childish superstition. Instead, he argues that we are meant to apprehend some things as children, and his sermon on the descent ends up being a beautiful rebuttal to iconoclasm itself. In his arguments and in many of those written in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries belief in the Harrowing is a kind of socially productive superstition, a belief in something hugely complex and miraculous that has been rendered comprehensible through enjoyable narrative. The *OED* defines superstition as "religious belief or practice considered to be irrational, unfounded, or based on fear or ignorance; excessively credulous belief in and reverence for the supernatural." Though Luther and the theologians who insist on Christ's descent into hell would never call the belief superstitious, the belief is characterized as superstitious by their opponents. The description of how the faithful are to believe—that they are to rely on an image and not rationalize it—does make it fit the *OED*'s definition of superstition as well. Of course, Luther was not famous for his adherence to predestination theology.

Jean Calvin, on the other hand, was best known for his belief in God's predestination of all souls, and so it might seem more likely that he dismissed the Harrowing of Hell outright. This is not the case. In *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin does call the idea that Christ released the patriarchs from hell childish and ridiculous: "But this story, although it is repeated by great authors, and even today is

earnestly defended as true by many persons, still is nothing but a story. It is childish to enclose the souls of the dead in a prison.”⁵¹ But he also insists on the necessity and centrality of the descent to an understanding of Christian redemption. He concludes not that the souls were saved from hell, but that “Christ shone upon them with the power of his Spirit, enabling them to realize that the grace which they had only tasted in hope was then manifested to the world.”⁵² Thus Calvin insists that Christ did in fact descend into hell and while he did not save the souls of the patriarchs because only the reprobate are in hell at this point, the descent did have a larger and more important purpose than a children’s story. Calvin writes:

He had, therefore, to conquer that fear which by nature continually torments and oppresses all mortals. This he could do only by fighting it... Therefore, by his wrestling hand to hand with the devil’s power, with the dread of death, with the pains of hell, he was victorious and triumphed over them, that in death we may not now fear those things which our Prince has swallowed up.⁵³

The importance of Luther’s and Calvin’s interpretations of the descent is that the Church of England clergymen who deny a descent into hell at all are *not* following either Luther or Calvin. In fact, both Luther and Calvin argue against those who “like to soar to the heights and who mock our simplicity” (Luther) or “boldly chatter about things they know nothing of” (Calvin). Because the Church of England clergymen are not blindly following the understandings of the most prominent Reformation theologians, their efforts to revise or remove the doctrine must be seen as part of the formation of the

⁵¹ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Ed John T. McNeill. Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 514.

⁵² Ibid, 514.

⁵³ Ibid, 517.

Anglican faith. These Englishmen saw themselves as prominent enough thinkers and translators to debate the lines of the Apostle's Creed on their own merit, and as scholars, we must treat those texts as important contributions to the identity formation of the Church and the State.

Throughout this dissertation I focus on clusters of the pamphlets debating Christ's descent. I read these thematically, as a student of literature rather than a historian of theology, and place them next to the literary reinterpretations of the Harrowing of Hell to see reciprocal relationships. The Church of England theologians who argue for a literal descent, if not in body at least in soul, are Thomas Bilson, John Whitgift, Adam Hill, John Higgins, Richard Parkes, Richard Bernard, and William Allen. The men who argue against a literal descent and insist that it is either metaphorical or merely superstitious are Hugh Broughton, Christopher Carlile, Alexander Hume, and Andrew Willett. While their professions vary, each of these men calls himself a member of the Church of England. Their contributions to the debate should be seen as attempts at clarifying and directing the future of Anglican theology rather than as subversions of the Church mandates. The dedications and prefaces that I explore in the following chapters show that each of these men put their reputations and lives on the line to speak directly to the highest powers in their country because they felt the interpretation of this Article of Faith was *that* important. The Harrowing of Hell does not disappear, but the theological debate does. It seems that, for the most part, modern Protestants follow Luther by accepting Christ's magical defeat of evil on faith alone.

In his 1650 defense of alchemical knowledge and its usefulness for the English Christian, *Magia Adamica*, Thomas Vaughan writes, “Magic is nothing else but the wisdom of the creator revealed and planted in the creature.”⁵⁴ Vaughan’s words here are surprising for a number of reasons. Our critical understanding of the early modern period dictates that religion and magic are uneasy bedfellows at best, vicious enemies more often than not. Even if we understand Vaughan’s alchemical knowledge to be closer to science, a form of proto-scientific discourse perhaps, religion and science have long been considered antitheses, completely incompatible in the modern world. And yet, Vaughan’s statement remains; it holds up origin as its claim, even as it recalls an origin story that most would say directly refutes its logic. This understanding of Genesis certainly does not see knowledge as the root of evil; there’s even something Promethean in the idea that the creator God reveals his wisdom to man willingly. Despite the fact that magical knowledge, especially as it was passed between men in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is derived from books and complicated diagrams and equations, Vaughan does not refer to this exclusivity or even elitism. Magic, Vaughan indicates, is available to “the creature.” That magic was not either heresy or arcane knowledge available only to the most educated, but instead was something widely available and in certain circumstances respected and valued is a view of early modern epistemology that is widely underexplored. That magic and religion and science are not competing discourses that demonize each other for primacy in a contentious landscape is a necessary correction to our understanding of the intellectual and artistic climate of the period. The Harrowing of

⁵⁴ Thomas Vaughan, *Magia Adamica, or the Antiquitie of Magic*, EEBO, 1650.

Hell narrative is a site where the discourses of magic, science, and religion come together to form a coherent picture of what would be considered righteous intervention in the supernatural world.

The Harrowing of Hell is important and overlooked source material for Renaissance depictions of magic for several reasons. First, it redefines the contexts of “lawful” and “acceptable” magical practice by placing it under God’s purview rather than the courts, local or ecclesiastical. When Christ is the model for the magician, the authority for magical acts is virtually unquestionable. When these acts are questioned, it says as much about the accusers as it does about the accused. Secondly, this material opens up the possibility of accessing magic and the power it provides to a wider variety of people precisely because the narrative itself is so widely available and the magic power is derived from a faith-filled understanding of the cosmic order rather than detailed knowledge of mathematical or anagrammatical equations. The only knowledge Christ needs to defeat Satan in hell is the knowledge that Satan wants his soul and the souls of mankind and that the contract implied by the fall gave Satan the impression he should have those souls. Finally, this source material is also useful to our understanding of magic use in the early modern period because it does not rely on either folk narratives to which we cannot have access or arcane knowledge from the continent that would likely have been questioned on its foreign status alone. Understanding how individuals accessed this model helps us to understand the surprising agents who perform lawful magic in the literature of the period.

This study makes no attempt to be comprehensive in its coverage of the Harrowing of Hell in early modern England. Instead, it hopes to open up multiple avenues for continued exploration. The descent debates alone warrant a book in their ability to provide a focal point for the way the Protestant Reformation unfolded in England and how the Anglican Church fashioned itself from the competing discourses around it. In order to present the chronological picture and to show how the literary representations affected the theological discourse, I begin, not with these debates, but with the Harrowing of Hell in the literary tradition of the Middle Ages and how these texts offer a particular characterization of Christ who becomes a unique object for affective piety that translates into the reformulations of the Harrowing of the early modern period. In each of the subsequent four chapters, I examine a central Renaissance retelling of the Harrowing of Hell alongside a set of theological debates with which the text interacts on a thematic level. The authors of these texts write in different genres and interact differently with their medieval inheritance and the contemporary discourse surrounding Christ's descent, but throughout I focus on the ways in which writers engage with the theologians, the sense of a shifting cosmos (or at least a shifting sense of the cosmos), and the emerging importance of individual human agency and will by reimagining Christ-figures who use harrowing actions to confront diabolical forces. Because it would be a gross oversimplification to say that the Renaissance continued the tradition of the Harrowing of Hell without conflict or controversy, each chapter explores various sides of the theological debate, controversial discourses of magic and religion and science, and multiple senses of human agency and subjectivity.

Examining the Middle English *Gospel of Nicodemus* and the medieval literary texts that draw on it, Chapter 2 demonstrates that these narratives complicate any easy moralistic reading of magic by highlighting the preexisting contract between God and Satan over men's souls. If false charming is healing the sick on the Sabbath and witchcraft is entering into deals with Lucifer, then Jesus is guilty on both accounts. Rather than bringing Christ's holiness into question, however, his actions redefine magical practice and make it emulable for mortal men and women. *Piers Plowman* shows Christ employing juridical rhetoric and "beguiling the beguiler" in order to save mankind from eternal damnation. The Digby *Harrowing of Hell* emphasizes the recognition of family relationships as central to salvation. The cycle plays highlight the militaristic victory of Christ over the gates of hell. These harrowing actions become the blueprint for future literary encounters with the devil.

To further emphasize the complexity of the Renaissance acceptance of the Harrowing tradition, I begin my examination of Renaissance text with Spenser's concern that perhaps the Harrowing of Hell cannot be Protestantized. Scholars have recognized the debt Book 1 of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* owes to the Harrowing of Hell in Redcrosse Knight's defeat of the dragon and in Arthur's retrieval of Redcrosse from Orgoglio's dungeon, but criticism has largely overlooked Archimago's and Night's more anxiety-provoking "harrowings," which prove more effective in raising the dead and binding spirits to the will of the harrower. Hugh Broughton, Thomas Bilson, and John Whitgift similarly look to the Classical past to either affirm or deny Christ's descent in their translations of scripture. I assert that this multiplication of harrowings in Spenser's

text reveals his apprehension about the lack of agency believers have over their own salvation in the new, contemplative Protestantism.

Chapter 4 begins to explore less anxious reinterpretations that feature emulable Christ-figures harrowing their hells. Cambridge theologians, Christopher Carlile, Adam Hill, and Alexander Hume insist that interpreting the third article is of the utmost importance to the law's ability to uphold social order. Controverting any respect for contract law, Faustus voluntarily sells his soul to Lucifer for twenty-four years of Mephistopheles's service, but he never seems to accept the terms he first proposed. Rather than reading Faustus's continual calling on Christ as Lutheran hopefulness or Calvinistic despair, I contend that Christopher Marlowe creates Faustus in the larger context of the original contract between God and Satan orchestrated at the Fall. Faustus, as both agent and object, uses juridical rhetoric to repeatedly threaten or harrow Mephistopheles of his wages and uses his third-party position in the contract to substitute the "thing" or body for the "value of the thing" or the soul.

In Chapter 5, I establish faith and family relationships as central to Christ's Harrowing of Hell and the theological debates over the descent written by John Higgins, Richard Parkes, and Andrew Willet. For these writers, England must acknowledge Catholicism as its parent and refrain from eschewing traditional worship if it wants to avoid atheism. William Shakespeare enters this debate by centering *The Winter's Tale* on similar issues of lineage and the redemption of family members. In this play, Paulina recalls the harrowings of the cycle plays by confounding the diabolically tyrannical

Leontes with her words, rescuing babies from dungeons, and bringing mothers back from the dead.

Chapter 6 concludes this study by looking at a late-seventeenth century harrowing retelling. Margaret Cavendish reinterprets the Harrowing's relationship to the Fall and the Last Judgment in *The Blazing World* by creating her own world, enacting its fall from grace in the form of in-fighting factions, harrowing her home from the hell of political instability, and enforcing everlasting peace and tranquility through military might. Following (or perhaps leading) new theological emphases on the vastness of God's creation evinced through exploration and scientific discovery as warrant for God's omnipotence, Cavendish joins Richard Bernard and William Allen in conflating magic, science, and theology.

CHAPTER II

CHRIST AS RITUAL MASTER IN THE HARROWING TRADITION

Thus spoke the Devil to me once: “God too has his Hell: it is his love for human beings.” And lately I heard him say this word too: “God is dead; it is of his pity for human beings that God had died.”

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*⁵⁵

The Harrowing of Hell is the major confrontation between Christ and the devil in the Christian tradition. The Bible provides the story of several interactions between God and the devil. In Genesis, if we accept that the serpent is indeed *the* adversary, God curses the serpent for tricking Adam and Eve into eating the fruit (Genesis 3:14-15). In Job, God and Satan make a bet that Job will curse God if he falls on bad luck (Job 1:6-12). But Jesus and Satan only meet briefly in the canonical scriptures for the temptation in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11) and, depending on interpretation, for the Last Judgment in Revelations. While Satan’s presence is often less than explicit throughout the Bible stories, Christ is presented explicitly only in the New Testament, but the Old Testament presents the conditions under which a sacrificial Christ is necessary. The Creation and Fall stories in Genesis enact a covenant between God and man that is never fully resolved in the canonical Bible; any sense of resolution is dependent upon the interpretation of Revelations. The terms of this contract are: God gives man the paradise of Eden in return

⁵⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and Nobody*. Trans. Graham Parkes. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 205.

for worship and obedience. Man breaks the covenant by disobeying God's order not to eat from the tree, but man's responsibility is mitigated by the interference of a third party the serpent. There is no way that man can make up for his disobedience to God and regain everlasting paradise. God and man are destined to have an adversarial relationship forever, unless someone can take on the burden of man's disobedience and somehow appease God. This brief summary represents a very legalistic and impersonal view of this covenant, but there is an affective side, which is perhaps more important to literary tradition, as well. In the Christian tradition, Jesus Christ willingly sacrifices himself so that God and man can be reunited in spirit and love. This becomes the affective aspect of this contract and the basis of relationships. Christ's willing sacrifice is full of pathos. Man recognizes his inadequacy and his sin, and God recognizes man's lack of culpability and offers forgiveness. In the process of making and fulfilling the legal and logical contract, intra-natural relationships have become both emotional and complex. The original contract has become quite complicated. What could be interpreted as God's righteous anger at our disobedience can now be seen as a complex version of mercy that acknowledges Satan's involvement in the Fall. God realizes that Adam was goaded into his disobedience by Satan and so he offers his only son, Jesus to pay the debt for said disobedience. There were two parties, then there were three parties, and now there are four parties.

In the epigraph to this chapter, Friedrich Nietzsche uses this central Christian mythos to argue against affect. For Nietzsche, we are to identify with God and learn *not* to feel pity lest we die or worse, feel subservient. Here, Nietzsche neuters the devil; he

becomes a conversant, a friend even, from whom one may get information. This interpretation of the relationship between God and the devil is surprisingly modern: fewer and fewer Christians state that they believe in the devil and therefore he becomes a storybook character rather than a threat.⁵⁶ Yet, Nietzsche's famously shocking statement that God is dead is couched in very personal terms in this brief passage. Rather than discuss what God might represent or what will happen to mankind without him, Nietzsche writes the story of the prophet Zarathustra who apparently regularly converses with hermits and the devil to glean new information about the cosmic order, and this information comes through as the expression of emotion. God *feels* pain because he *loves* man who suffers. God dies for *pity* of mankind. These emotions are not impersonal or contractual; instead, they imply an affective relationship between God, man, and the devil. Nietzsche is not talking about the Harrowing of Hell in this passage—the history of philosophy would be quite different if he were—but *he could be*. Zarathustra's statement that God has died for his pity of human beings accurately describes Christ's motivation for sacrificing himself and descending into hell to defeat Satan. Nietzsche does not want mankind to feel pity, but these emotions allow for affective identification, which allows for an understanding of why there is a need to appease emotion through payment that motivates the entire story and contract. The Harrowing of Hell is the actual exchange that satisfies the emotions that are brought about in Genesis and through the substitution of Christ for mankind. Interestingly, the cosmically adversarial relationship between the

⁵⁶ Baylor University. *The Baylor Religion Survey, Wave II*. (Waco, TX: Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion [producer]). 2007.

devil and God is supposed to motivate human beings to act in both Nietzsche's version, where we are to eschew pity and God, and the Harrowing of Hell tradition, which indicates that we should identify affectively with Christ to help save ourselves from the devil. In the case of the Harrowing of Hell tradition, emotion and identification are the fuel that powers action.

In the Introduction to this dissertation, I argue that the Harrowing of Hell narratives work through affective piety to bequeath a sense of supernatural agency to early modern England and that this sense of control and empowerment in the fate of one's own soul helps to make up for the crisis of agency created by Protestant emphases on predestination theology. Writers participate in this supernatural agency by rewriting the cultural materials of their recent past into new and engaging narratives featuring the defeat of evil by characters from diverse backgrounds. In this chapter, I present the medieval Harrowing of Hell texts and argue that these texts offer a coherent picture of Christ as a liminal, magician figure. I begin by discussing some of the larger issues the Harrowing of Hell narrative brings up, including the issue of genre and that of exegetical logic and sacred time. I then move on to the idea of Christ as a ritual master in a general sense and in the context of the Harrowing of Hell narrative specifically. In the third section, I look at how the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and its late medieval descendants depict Christ as a practitioner of magic rather than as distinct characters, separately human and divine. Finally, I look at the distinct actions of Christ in the Harrowing of Hell as rituals that can be emulated and cultural materials that can be rewritten for new characters. These actions include trickery and deceit, breaking down gates and military conquest,

arguing and rhetoric and negotiations, robbery or claiming of property, and rescuing people and restoring people to life and healing. I group together the Middle English *Gospel of Nicodemus*⁵⁷, the Digby Harrowing of Hell⁵⁸, William Langland's *Piers Plowman*⁵⁹, the York, Chester, N-Town, and Townley cycle plays⁶⁰ as a set of Harrowing

⁵⁷ Because the scriptural basis for the Harrowing of Hell and the Doctrine of the descent originates in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, which contains two parts: *The Acts of Pilate* and *Christ's Descent into Hell*, I begin with this text. In terms of the original source, scholars debate the authorship and dating of the apocryphon, but many have concluded that the two sections were likely composed in the fifth or sixth century. The Latin A text from which the medieval translations and interpretations draw refers to a Greek original; however, it does not appear to have been circulating in medieval England. In England, the *Gospel* exists in both poetic and prosaic translations. William Henry Hulme produced a side-by-side edition of several manuscripts featuring the narrative poem, the *Harrowing of Hell* and the *Gospel of Nicodemus* in 1907, and no critical edition of these texts grouped together has been released since, although other editions and translations of the Latin version of the apocryphon have appeared sporadically over the course of the twentieth century. William Henry Hulme, ed. *The Middle-English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus*. (London: Early English Text Society, 1907), Hulme purports that these Middle English translations are related and come from the translator Trevisa (xxxiv). The manuscripts that have been preserved date from the fifteenth century, but Hulme argues, "All of these MSS. must be considered copies of earlier ones, and they would all seem to go back eventually to the same original," which he believes was composed close to the end of the thirteenth century (xv). See also Karl Tamburr, "From Narrative to Drama: The Transformation of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* in Middle English." *Medieval Perspectives* 16 (2001): 135-150, Tamburr concurs with this dating, arguing that the *Gospel* translations coincide with the height of the "affective piety of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries" (140). The association with affective piety is important because it returns us to the idea that these texts contributed to the sating of the desire for fuller, more involved spiritual lives in the period.

⁵⁸ The Digby *Harrowing of Hell* is also collected by Hulme, but it is different from the *Gospel of Nicodemus* in many ways. Firstly, there is the question of genre. See Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England*, Tamburr calls it an early verse play, writing, "This text seems clearly intended for performance" (113). There is no *dramatis personae*, and it does not seem to be connected to the cycle plays in any discernible way. If it is indeed a play, it was likely performed in the church by clergymen with few if any props. Secondly, there are differences in content between the poetic *Harrowing* and the poetic *Gospel*. The *Harrowing of Hell* does not begin with the trial of Jesus in front of Pilate, and it contains a long debate between Christ and Satan that is not in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. The extended debate scene indicates that the intended audience was educated and interested in rhetoric. The interest in rhetoric and education is continued and greatly expanded in the Renaissance. Finally, the verse form is different: unlike the *Gospel's* distinctive twelve-line stanzas, the *Harrowing* is written in rhyming couplets. Both texts were likely composed at the end of the thirteenth century, however, and they therefore predate and are possible sources for later poetry and plays written on the same topics and themes.

⁵⁹ William Langland, *Piers Plowman*. Norton Critical Edition, Elizabeth Robertson and Stephen H. A. Shepherd, eds. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006). One of the works that takes up many of the themes present in the *Gospel* and in the *Harrowing of Hell* is William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, composed in latter half of the fourteenth century. Though Elizabeth Robertson and Stephen H. A. Shepherd point out that the attribution to William Langland is based only on evidence from within the text, they still refer to the poem as Langland's, and I follow that tradition here. *Piers Plowman* consists of at least three texts, the A, B, and C versions. Quotations from *Piers Plowman* come from their edition of the B-Text.

of Hell texts that present a multi-valent Christ who performs ritual actions to defeat diabolical forces.⁶¹ The analysis in this chapter sets up the harrowing model, key terms,

Like the cycle plays, Langland's allegorical poem covers most of the biblical events featuring Christ's life and death, but Langland layers these stories with the conversations of allegorical figures and, of course, the poem's sometime narrator, Piers. I am primarily interested in "Passus XVIII" and "Passus XIX," the scenes of Jesus's trial and crucifixion and the Harrowing of Hell. In these scenes we see a specifically fourteenth-century take on the events of Christ's life and his actions and responses because the allegorical commentators offer interpretations (and even disagreements) on the events as they unfold. While it would not be accurate to attribute any of these interpretations directly to Langland, it is safe to say that they represent High Medieval heteroglossia.

⁶⁰ Of the cycle plays, which also have a complex relationship to the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church, I examine the York, the Townley/Wakefield, the Chester, and the N-Town cycles. Scholars widely agree that the cycle plays are a product of the late fourteenth century, and most see the cycle plays as a product of the Corpus Christi feast creation. The new feast took place in June, and as one of the longest days of the year, would have been perfect for long outdoor performances of plays. The N-Town Cycle contains two Harrowing of Hell plays, A and B, but neither is fleshed out to the degree that the descent is in the other three texts. Neither has a notable confrontation, and the demons cede hell without a fight or a debate. In the other three cycles, the Harrowing is a more dramatic confrontation. The York and the Towneley Harrowings are very similar, but the Towneley more fully characterizes the devils. The Chester cycle is notable for its rebellious demons and its comic interlude at the end which has a local taverner enter hell after the Harrowing because her brewing skills were not satisfactory. The cycle plays represent the most literal, and in some ways the most consistent, depiction of the Harrowing of Hell available to medieval subjects in the Late Middle Ages; however, though many critics argue that these cycles were organized by the Catholic Church as a method of control, I maintain that for the guildsmen and townspeople involved in the production, the opportunity to embody and perform the outcomes of affective piety resulted in a fuller sense of the self and one's agency in the supernatural world. See the introductions to *English Mystery Plays* and *The Wakefield Mystery Plays* for more information about the dating and manuscripts of these plays: Peter Happé, *English Mystery Plays*. (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1975) and Martial Rose, *The Wakefield Mystery Plays: The Complete Cycle of Thirty-Two Plays* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1961).

⁶¹ Much of the criticism that addresses the Harrowing of Hell specifically focuses on manuscript study or theological issues. C. W. Marx argues specifically for manuscript study as primary in this case: "But it is the manuscripts which have the most to tell us about how the *Gospel of Nicodemus* was used; and so, where possible, it is from the manuscripts that this essay draws much of its evidence." While I am obliged to the scholars who have worked closely with the manuscripts, I am not interested in furthering bibliographic study of these texts, and while I am more interested in the theological readings of the texts, we have not sufficiently explored the literary and artistic possibilities for these works. Thus, I have eschewed bibliographic details in order to provide a reading of several of the texts containing the Harrowing narrative. I rely heavily on the work of excellent translators and editors like William Henry Hulme, H.C. Kim, Zbigniew Izydorczyk, and J. K. Elliott. I am also deeply indebted to the work of Karl Tamburr who has written the only monograph on the Harrowing tradition in England. My readings and analyses build on their indispensable work. See C.W. Marx, "The *Gospel of Nicodemus* in Old English and Middle English." In *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe*, edited by Zbigniew Izydorczyk. 207-59 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, 1997). H. C. Kim, ed. *The Gospel of Nicodemus* (Toronto: Centre for Medieval Studies, 1973), Zbigniew Izydorczyk, ed. *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe*. Vol. 158, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies (Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, 1997), J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A*

and tropes of the Harrowing of Hell that recur through the reimaginings I examine in the remainder of this dissertation.

Reading Christ as a character is important because it displaces the binary thinking of human OR divine and considers what it means to be human and divine. Part of being human is feeling emotion. From the beginning (again, with Genesis) we can see that man is created as both human and divine—made of clay and made in God’s image, which helps to explain statements like Thomas Vaughan’s “Magic is nothing else but the wisdom of the creator revealed and planted in the creature” (discussed in the Introduction), but it also helps to explain the belief in the human ability to interact with and affect the supernatural.⁶² People have power and can do things not because they are made of clay, which does not have power and cannot do things, but because they are created in God’s image and because God loves them. Christ’s power derives not simply from his status as God’s son but his humanity, which really gives him a power God does not have, the power to *not* be a god at least in appearances. These may not be dominant theological positions, but they are positions that reading these texts as literature allows us to discover, and, recursively, circulating the narrative of the Harrowing as literature, creates the liminal, magical Christ as a cultural object. Thus the analysis of literature gives us the opportunity to see how the evidence at hand in these texts adds up to the conclusions that Christ is a magician and that the performance of magic is efficacious and righteous in certain circumstances. Thus we are able to differently interrogate the nature

Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁶² Vaughan, *Magia Adamica, or the Antiquitie of Magic*, EEBO, 1650.

of religion, faith, and cosmological epistemologies of the late Middle Ages and the early modern period because we can see the possibility for appropriate magical practice and its continuation, despite political upheaval. Furthermore, the harrowing ritual of rescuing the souls of the patriarchs and prophets changes the human subject back into a divine subject in the cosmic order and in the literal aspects of the narratives because Christ takes men from their most debased, most carnal state (tormented in hell) and raises them up their most exalted level (redeemed in heaven). The set of rituals or the ritualizations, then, shrinks the amazing power of transformation to individualized, doable actions, just as sacred time and the cycle plays shrinks scripture to a year or even a day, eclipsing the temporal space between the Fall, the Harrowing, and the Last Judgment.

The Perpetual Battle: Genre, Exegetical Logic, and Sacred Time

In this section, I first look at genre and a few of the arguments that have been made concerning the genre of the Harrowing of Hell as narrative. I then discuss exegetical logic and the collapsing of time and character in liturgy and the cycle plays that accompanied that liturgy. Finally I discuss the related concept of sacred time that suspends the world momentarily for participants in ritual. The Harrowing of Hell has not been frequently or recently discussed because it seems like a small, neglected piece of Apocrypha and there are few overt modern references to it, but I argue that it is not only important in a medieval context, but it also survives as a central cultural inheritance in the Renaissance and Restoration periods. The Harrowing of Hell offers a sense of power, of

being quasi-divine *without* breeding or education. In this way, the supernatural agency and ritualization of the Harrowing provides a kind of social and political mobility.

The Harrowing of Hell narrative has an interesting position vis-à-vis genre, and this is especially apparent when it is staged as part of a large Biblical cycle of plays because it occupies a central position between the Fall and the Last Judgment. It is not a comedy or a tragedy, and it is not a miracle play. The Harrowing of Hell has the possibilities of carnival and the suspension of traditional hierarchy, but it is more akin to the epic, in its culminating war capabilities. Most importantly for the purposes of this analysis is the fact that the Harrowing of Hell serves as a climax, or turning point in the fates of mankind regarding the contract enacted in Genesis. Before the Harrowing, mankind is the victim of God's wrath because Adam and Eve disobeyed and ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge. After the Harrowing, mankind is reconciled to God because Christ has travelled to hell and paid the bail for their release. Peter Stuart Macaulay explains:

In all the plays until the Harrowing the Protagonist of the Christian drama of Redemption has been confronted with the guileful and pernicious activities of the Antagonist. The Harrowing of Hell by Christ resolves the epic conflict, and the Devil is defeated for all eternity. Doctrinally, the apocryphal episodes of the *Descensus Christi ad Infernos* and the *Extraccio Animarum* both climax and summarize the theology of the Redemption.⁶³

The Harrowing is indeed the central and climactic point for the whole of scripture, and it needs recognition as such for us to understand the important influence it had on medieval

⁶³ Peter Stuart Macaulay, "The Play of the Harrowing of Hell as a Climax in the English Mystery Cycles." *Studia Germanica Gandensia*. 8 (1966): 115-134, 134.

and early modern understandings of religion and magic. Roberta Mullini argues that *The Harrowing of Hell* fits into a three part narrative structure for Satan. He falls from heaven, fails to tempt Christ, and is defeated in hell. Mullini writes,

The Harrowing of Hell, the first unearthly episode of Christ's life staged in the cycles, seems to serve three major purposes: it reinforces the audience's perception of each cycle as a whole; it balances the tragedy of Christ's death with a spectacular 'comic' solution; it offers the later playwrights the dramatic antecedent on which to engraft the themes of mankind's adventure in the world.⁶⁴

Mullini points out that the Harrowing is central to the understanding of scripture that the cycle plays offer, but the Harrowing play, and the narrative within the history/future of scripture fits into a three part narrative structure for God and for man as well. God's anger and hurt are appeased by Christ's sacrifice which makes him once again united with his creation, mankind. Man has suffered the wrath of God's punishment, felt remorse, and been released from bondage. In all these cases, the Harrowing is the central story that works out the hitherto unresolved conflicts between these all-important parties. Mullini considers *The Harrowing* a comic interlude in which the audience rejoices at the complete and permanent defeat of evil, but this ignores mankind's place in the second half of the Biblical journey, somewhere between Harrowing and Last Judgment. This leaves the medieval audience in a strangely free position that indicates that they cannot fall and cannot be damned, tempted, etc. In actuality, the cycle plays and the Christian religion emphasize the role of the present in the second half of the plot, the resolution of

⁶⁴ Roberta Mullini, "Action and Discourse in *The Harrowing of Hell*: The Defeat of Evil." *Medieval English Theatre* 11, no. 1-2 (1989): 116-28, 125.

the early conflict is being worked out in the believer's relationship to God and to Christ as he or she works toward the rightful place in the Last Judgment. The Harrowing is a turning point, but it is one that renews the sense of power for Christians over their own fate.

Thus the translations and retellings of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* show that there is a medieval investment in a coherent Harrowing narrative as integral to the cosmic order. It serves a pivotal role in the larger narrative of human life on earth that begins with the Fall and ends with the Last Judgment. It expands and changes the Passion narrative. J. K. Elliott argues, "Originally both parts [of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*] were separate: there is no organic link or even natural connexion between them" (165). Elliott refers here to the Acts of Pilate and the descent into hell as separate narratives that achieve different purposes. But the Middle English *Gospel of Nicodemus* forms an organic whole that under-emphasizes the pain and suffering of the Passion by skipping over the prolonged torture and the slow death on the cross and highlights Christ's power over Satan by extending the debate and the reclamation of the souls in hell, and this seamlessness seems to be the result of an effort made in translation. The translator seems to have wanted to see both Christ's characterization before Pilate and his activities in hell as related. As such, the Harrowing of Hell, or Christ's descent into hell is the largest and most important piece of evidence that is provided to the Sanhedrin to prove that Jesus is the son of god, but it is only one piece of a larger narrative that focuses on proving Jesus's divinity and his personal power to nonbelievers.

The contract that is enacted in Genesis engenders such issues of pathos that Christ's defeat of Satan is necessarily an emotionally satisfying event, but it does not simply serve the purpose of emotional fulfillment. Harry Anderson and Leanore Lieblein write: "The action on the stage must be shaped to ensure that there is no doubt about the outcome of the contest between Christ and Satan."⁶⁵ This view of the conflict in the Harrowing destroys the suspense in this central, climactic moment. The Harrowing of Hell works out the emotional and legal concerns of all members of the initial contract, and there must be some doubt to have a sense of complete victory. In some ways, Satan's defeat must be complete to satisfy mankind's doubt about his own worthiness and the anger and frustration resulting from the sense that one has been cheated. To read this as an always already decided defeat is to under-emphasize the role of the devil in the lives of medieval Christians and to read the present Christian perspective that the devil is not intimately involved in human life back onto earlier texts and cultures.

Moreover, under-emphasizing the power of Satan in the conflict between man, God, and Satan involves an understanding of scripture as a set of metaphorical guidelines that conflicts with the purpose of the cycle plays or the Harrowing of Hell narratives, which was to insist on man's place in a certain cosmic order. The critical or scholarly interpretation of scripture, or exegesis as it is often termed, is enacted through the reinterpretations of the Harrowing of Hell and the other cycle plays throughout the Middle Ages. The interpretations, often designed to highlight the typological connections

⁶⁵ Harry S. Anderson and Leanore Lieblein, "Staging Symbolic Action in the Medieval Cycle Drama: The York/Townley *Harrowing of Hell*." *Fifteenth Century Studies* 13 (1988): 211-220, 214.

between characters and events, are an intellectual component to the arguments about the affective elements of the Harrowing of Hell. Meditation on Christ's life shapes how medieval subjects see themselves in relation to the cosmic order and the supernatural powers that guide and motivate their lives. While the Harrowing narratives in written form or performed as a play may have been suspenseful, frightening, comic, and comforting, these renditions also argued that Christians should understand themselves as subject to the logic of the larger scriptural narrative that begins in Genesis and ends (or will end) in Revelations. Ruth Nisse calls this logic "exegetical logic" to underscore this process of reading Biblical texts as explanations of a larger system of cosmic order. Nisse further explains that "imagination effectively suspends the temporal or historical difference at the basis of exegetical logic."⁶⁶ Thus the work of affective piety and identification with Christ works to counter the sense of exegetical logic as based entirely on a temporal relationship. Time does not indicate the salvation or damnation of man; instead, Christ's actions at a particular moment, suspended between the Fall and the Last Judgment bring about that salvation.

If exegetical logic required Christians to see themselves as subject to the cosmic order in the Bible, then affective piety asked them to see themselves as the subject of scriptural events. Imaginative identification accentuates the emotional elements of involvement in the Christian mythos in the same way that exegetical logic focuses on the intellectual elements. The performance of cycle plays in a single twenty-four hour period or over the course of a weekend created a sense of "sacred time," or a temporary collapse

⁶⁶ Nisse, *Defining Acts*, 12.

and suspension of huge swaths of cosmic history. Mircea Eliade contrasts sacred time with profane time in *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*.⁶⁷ Eliade writes:

Every religious festival, any liturgical time represents the reactualization of a sacred event that took place in a mythical past, 'in the beginning.' Religious participation in a festival implies emerging from ordinary temporal duration and reintegration of the mythical time reactualized by the festival itself. Hence sacred time is indefinitely recoverable, indefinitely repeatable.⁶⁸

The medieval participant in affective piety is thus comfortable with the suspension of time involved in meditation and play performances that condense Christ's life into an infinitely repeatable narrative structure. Reading the Harrowing texts or participating in the cycle plays—as an audience member or in the cast—is participation in ritual that showed individuals their place in the cosmic order, but it also allowed these individuals to shift their place in that cosmic order based on with whom they logically and emotionally identify. These seemingly momentary choices in reading and emotional involvement determine the situation and the level of agency in ritualization.

Schemes in the Body, or Ritualization

Ritual is the conscious repetition of symbolic action in order to reconstruct one's self and one's place in the social order (both earthly and cosmic). Ritual requires an original actor to copy (and perhaps revise), and in the case of the Christian religion, the original actor is frequently Adam, an apostle, or Christ. The cycle plays show a process

⁶⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc., 1957).

⁶⁸ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 68-69.

from reading and learning actions to embodying characters on stage and can be profitably viewed as what Catherine Bell calls ritualization. Christ serves as the ritual master or the “social agent in whose body lies the schemes by which to shift the organization or significance of many other culturally possible situations.”⁶⁹ Though Bell’s aim is not to discuss Christian or even western ritual in particular, this description of ritualization is particularly useful when considering Christ as the ritual master and the Harrowing of Hell as a process of ritualization because Christ’s body centers in the narrative, and through its multiple possibilities it restructures the organization of society. A scheme can be either a structure, as in an organization, or a plan. Christ’s body serves as both simultaneously. It holds the organization of the cosmos in both its divinity and its humanity, but it also schemes against hell in the Harrowing tradition. Furthermore, the body—as in the human body—becomes the scheme or deceitful plan to gain entrance to hell and defeat Satan through trickery. The believers who see themselves as both subject to exegetical logic and the subject of the Harrowing narrative profit greatly from identification with Christ because he is the defeater of evil, the agent with power.

The Harrowing of Hell takes the issues of sacrifice and substitution so central to the Passion and Crucifixion and expands them to examine them in detail. Believers who may question why and how the substitution of Christ’s body for their own changes the law and absolves them of original sin are given an explanation in the description of Christ as disguised as mortal when he descends into hell and in the debate between Christ and Satan over the rights of each to the souls of the dead. In the Harrowing narrative, Christ is

⁶⁹ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 107-108.

both the agent for changing the law—the one who debates with and binds Satan to deliver the souls—and the substitution for those souls in form of bail. His actions restructure the entire contract or covenant between God and man that forms the backbone of the cosmic order for medieval Christians. The experience of the Harrowing of Hell, whether read and meditated upon in solitude or experienced through all the senses on the stage, changes the medieval subject's understanding of the self both as subject to God and as the subject of the heart of the Christian narrative. When ritual participants consume the body, they perform the apostles at the Last Supper; when they kneel, they perform Adam and Eve before God. But when these subjects confront power structures, sacrifice themselves, and argue for their rights, they perform the Harrowing Christ.

Affective piety and the Harrowing of Hell tradition impinge upon subjectivity because Christ is the consummate model for the self. David Aers argues that the conversations about subjectivity and agency that span the transition between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance oversimplify the traditions of the Middle Ages. He writes that in these studies of subjectivity:

Centuries of Christian traditions, an extraordinarily diversified, complex and profoundly adaptive culture of discourses and practices [are] turned into a homogenous, static, and uncomplicated monolith.⁷⁰

Examining the Harrowing of Hell narrative for what it says about the discourses of religion, magic, and science in these periods and thereby what it tells us about how

⁷⁰ David Aers, "A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the 'History of the Subject'." *Culture and History 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities, and Writing*, Ed. David Aers (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 178.

medieval and early modern subjects constructed themselves is one way of closely examining this shift to look at the details. Though it is safe to say that for the medieval and early modern Christian Christ was the most highly recommended exemplar of the self, it is also clear from the tellings and retellings of the Harrowing that writers collapsed distinctions between God and Christ, and between Satan and his demons. In order to understand how this affective identification worked, it is necessary to look closely at the character of Christ. In *Renaissance Self Fashioning*, Stephen Greenblatt admits, “As we might expect, the recurrent model for this latter fashioning is Christ,” but he does not note the numerous facets of Christ that were available for identification and emulation in Renaissance texts.⁷¹ The Harrowing tradition gives us an opportunity to look closely at that Christ and to see how writers may have interpreted his actions to create characters that interacted with supernatural powers to their own benefit.

Affective piety leads toward identification with Christ. In its emphasis on the body of Christ, affective piety is easily ritualized. As an example of how this ritualization works, Piers in Passus XVIII of William Langland’s *Piers Plowman* experiences the cyclical process of ritualization that empowers him to confront evil in his own life. The dream vision sequence at the start of the Harrowing episode begins as a jousting tournament but morphs into the trial before Pilate before showing the descent into hell. As Robertson and Shepherd point out, “Although [*Piers Plowman*] is known as a personification allegory, it refuses to keep the allegorical and the literal separate.”⁷² In

⁷¹ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 2.

⁷² Robertson and Shepherd, “Preface,” *Piers Plowman*, xi.

Passus XVIII, Langland highlights the palimpsestic nature of religious allegory by presenting a confused narrator. When his dream vision shows Piers that someone resembling himself comes riding into Jerusalem on an ass on Palm Sunday, the confusion between the everyman character, Piers, and Jesus sets the scene for what is to follow. Langland, refusing to make one-to-one correspondences in his allegory, creates a situation in which Jesus stands in for Piers in Piers's dream. This becomes a sort of recursive ritualization where Piers dreams of the passions of Christ which then morphs into seeing himself appear as Christ or Christ as himself. Langland describes Piers focusing on Christ's passion: "gretly me dremed...of Crystes passioun and penaunce" before the vision of himself as Christ materializes before him: "One semblable to the Samaritan and somedel to Piers the Plowman / Barfote on an asse bakke botelees cam pryke."⁷³ Rather than simply rewriting the *Gospel of Nicodemus* with Piers as the protagonist, Langland illustrates a process by which Piers sees himself as Christ and sees Christ as taking on *his* humanity in order to joust with the devil. When Faith tells Piers that the man who is getting ready to joust is Piers himself, Piers replies, "Is Piers in this place?" Faith explains not that Piers is not actually present but that Christ will joust in Piers's arms: "This Jhesus of his genrice wole juste in Piers armes, / In his helme and in his haberioun, *humana natura*, / That Cryst be nought biknowe here for *consummates*

⁷³ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVIII.7-11. "I dreamed chiefly of Christ's passion and pain for the people he had reached for. One resembling the Samaritan and somewhat Piers the Plowman / Barefoot on an ass's back bootless came riding." (Translation Robertson and Shepherd.)

Deus.”⁷⁴ In this case the meditation/dream vision has two effects; one, Piers identifies directly with the Christ who is about to face the devil for the souls of mankind and Piers’s body/clothing serve as the humanity that shields Christ from detection as a divine being. Not only does the individual gain from associating himself with Christ, but Christ benefits from the guise of humanity.

Though Jesus will stand in for all mankind in the Passion, Crucifixion, and Harrowing, Piers seems to be experiencing this stand-in as a loss of his own identity or as a blurring of his identity with Jesus’s. Here Langland makes explicit what is implicitly argued throughout the Harrowing texts: Jesus is the model for human interaction on earth and in hell, and men are supposed to act as he does. Emphasizing this identity confusion, Piers questions Faith, “Is Piers in this place?”⁷⁵ In essence, he asks if he is there, but the question is not a “Where am I?” as much as it is a “Who am I?” or a “What role do I play here?” The identity confusion is important because it allows Langland to advance an argument about how the scriptural events should be interpreted. The argument seems to be that Jesus’s narrative is meant to be experienced personally through the emulation of Jesus’s actions. These actions are meant to align the participant with the cosmic order as it is portrayed through exegetical logic, and the performance of them occurs in a space that allows for the connections between characters and events to be experienced simultaneously in sacred time.

⁷⁴ Langland, *Piers Plowman* XVIII.21-24. “This Jesus for his gentleness will joust in Piers’s arms, / In his helmet and in his hauberk, *humana natura*, / So that Christ be not disclosed here as *consummates Deus*.” (Translation Robertson and Shepherd).

⁷⁵ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVIII, 21.

Because Christ is the model of the self and the Harrowing texts depict a different Christ than other traditions, it is important to focus on the way that Christ is represented in these texts. Since the Harrowing texts take as their central focus the moments between Christ's death and resurrection, a period of blurring roles, changing rules, and crossing boundaries, these poems and plays participate in doctrinal debates by questioning exactly when Christ is man and when he is god, but, as only literature can, they also use fantastical settings and characters to tackle questions of social order and hierarchy by staging witchcraft trials, debates over the legal rights of princes, and the triumph of the marginalized and oppressed over their current circumstances. At the center of this narrative is the character of Christ, a liminal Christ who is neither fully man nor fully divine and who manages to identify equally with both his nemesis and the victims he has come to rescue. He is the Prince of Light to Satan's Prince of Darkness, but he is also bruised and battered from his tortures just as the righteous souls of the patriarch he has come to rescue. This Christ is different from both the Warrior Christ—though that is certainly one of his possibilities—and from the Jesus as Mother figure. Karl Tamburr explains, "During the destruction of hell Christ is often portrayed as a warrior-king. While this depiction may seem at odds with the late-medieval portrait of Christ as a human sufferer or the 'Gentle Jesus' of the nineteenth century, it was a popular, important one in the early Church and during the Middle Ages."⁷⁶ Another of his important possibilities in the Harrowing narrative is that of family member, explored further in the final section. Caroline Walker Bynum notes that "the notion of Christ as

⁷⁶ Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England*, 28.

mother, like that of Christ as bridegroom, remains allegorical.”⁷⁷ Christ, when he is in hell, is martial and maternal, aristocratic and common. It is this multifaceted Christ that I argue serves as a model for the defeat of supernatural evil that is staged literally in the Middle Ages and reimagined and reinterpreted in the poetry, plays, and prose of the Renaissance.

In addition to the character of Christ, it is important to focus on his actions and the effects those actions produce. The schemes available through Christ as a model must be reproducible in order for ritualization to occur. Ritual must be emulable activity so it is also important to note which actions can be recognized as rituals from this tradition. The Harrowing of Hell narrative also provides blueprints or instructions about how to defeat Satan in hell. These actions become ritualized and can be emulated even in non-religious narratives: disguise for the purpose of deceit, breaking doors or gates to gain access, debate over the fate of one’s soul and the interpretation of God’s will, binding and imprisoning forces of evil, and sacrifice and substitution of one’s soul for another in order to help friends and/or kinsmen. These rituals provide possibilities for combatting evil through direct confrontation and individual agency, and they are especially attractive in a dominant tradition of intercessions and intermediaries where the subject is dependent upon others for perfection, prayer, and repentance. They complicate the reading of Catholics as acting through others and show that Catholic piety has active traditions as

⁷⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982).

well. This ritual tradition can be seen in medieval and early modern text throughout the Renaissance and into the Restoration.

Christ as Magician: The Liminal Figure

In the Harrowing of Hell tradition, Christ is a powerful rhetor and magician, a liminal figure who has power on earth and in hell. Christ is active, prominent, smart, mentally acute, verbal, and deceitful. He is heroic in the epic sense of the word. Christ can cross boundaries between mortal and divine, and this makes his characterization as a magician logical when one sees a magician as a subject who has power in both the mundane and spiritual worlds. Christ as a magician can effect change in the physical and spiritual worlds while still inhabiting both and travelling between realms, and for this reason I describe him as a liminal Christ. In this section, I argue that Christ is portrayed as a witch or sorcerer, confounding the widely accepted idea that people in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance saw miracle and magic as clearly delineated and differentiated categories. The Jews accuse Jesus of witchcraft because he can heal people and even raise the dead. Jesus sends Procula a dream that warns her about Pilate's fate. Lastly, Satan accuses Christ of performing magic "tricks" because he hides his divinity under his humanity in order to enter hell. Despite the fact that critics want to note the differences in how Christ is portrayed on earth (as a human Jesus) and in hell (as a divine Christ), the texts indicate that on earth, the problem with Christ is that he claims he is not human, while in heaven, the problem with Christ is that he claims he *is* human, deceiving Satan. Consistently throughout, the problem is not that Jesus is *only* human here or secretly

divine there; the problem is that he is both human and divine, a position which seems unique but is actually similar to the creation stories of mankind.

One way of examining how the character of Christ was viewed by the medieval audiences for the cycle plays is to consider how Christ is costumed where we have sufficient evidence. Norma Kroll notes:

Jesus becomes both an earthly character at the center of the mimetic struggle and a divine figure out on the edges of the conflict. The dramatist underscores Jesus's human nature appropriately but conventionally, as in Scripture, by costuming him as a gardener or tiller of the earth for his appearance to Mary Magdalene. But very differently at the play's close, a rubric / mandates that Jesus be clothed "*in similitudinem Domini*" ("in the likeness of the Lord"), not only highlighting his triumph in harrowing Hell but also making his victory an extra-earthly parallel to Mary's.⁷⁸

Though she uses the word "both" in her discussion, Kroll emphasizes the differences between Jesus as a man with earthly limitations and Christ as the powerful spiritual agent, but she notes that in the Harrowing Christ was portrayed as the latter, in a more eye-catching garb. Tamburr also explains:

Although medieval costume inventories are rare, they too suggest the costuming for Christ...the part of God was traditionally thought of as being acted 'in figure' and hence represented in a more stylized way that would be enhanced by a mask concealing the actor's features. The mask was probably painted gold to symbolize the light of divinity...internal evidence from the Descent plays themselves suggest that the actor playing Christ could have worn a similar costume...both suggest a white robe and gilt mask for the actor playing Christ.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Norma Kroll, "Power and Conflict in Medieval Ritual and Plays: The Re-Invention of Drama." *Studies in Philology* 102, no.4 (2005): 452-483, 476-477.

⁷⁹ Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell*, 123.

These descriptions of the Harrowing Christ reiterate the idea of Christ as divine in the Harrowing texts, connecting his character through his appearance to God rather than to man. Since the cycle plays were performed one after the other, however, the audience would have seen this Jesus transform into this Christ. The character would shed his gardener's garb and reemerge a shining ray of light to descend into hell. Besides, differentiating between the Jesus that undergoes the trial before Pilate and the Christ that defeats Satan with juridical rhetoric does a disservice to the many similarities between the Christ being tried for witchcraft and the man/god who descends to treat with Satan that are and would have been obvious to audiences. Another major complication with emphasizing the light imagery in Christ's costume is the similarities between Christ and Satan in the cycles.

In both the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and *Piers Plowman*, the accusations of witchcraft are surprisingly straightforward for an audience that is accustomed to a stark separation between miracle and magic. In *Piers Plowman*, for example, a cacchepolle (sergeant) simply says that Jesus can perform witchcraft: "Crucifige!...he kan of wicchecrafte."⁸⁰ In addition to not being the kind of supernatural power that we normally ascribe to Christ (miracle), this accusation is not a modern dismissive sense of magic, one that would indicate that Jesus can perform amusing or entertaining magic. The word "wicchecrafte" here is meant to be scary. We can tell this because the Jews give Jesus poison to prolong his life and thereby his torture, but he dies immediately, paradoxically

⁸⁰ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVIII, 46. "Crucify!...he knows sorcerer's tricks." (Translation Robertson and Shepherd).

giving some of the gathered crowd the impression that he could *still* be dangerous.

Langland writes, “And somme saide he was a wicche: ‘Good is that we assaye / Where he be ded or noughte ded doun er he be taken.’”⁸¹ Since the poison was intended to extend life and suffering, it is clear that the Jews and Romans fear what Christ is capable of when they say that they need to check to see if he is dead before they take him down from the cross. The watching crowd is concerned for their own safety because they apprehend that Christ’s ability to fight back is unlikely to be affected by death. If the purpose of the passion is to break the body and the agency implied by the corporeal frame and its musculature and mobility, then here the fears of the gathered multitude show clearly that no one intended the passion or the crucifixion to be enough to bind the power of this man/god. From the outset of this narrative of the Harrowing of Hell, Christ’s uncanny ability to cross the boundaries between life and death, human and divine is highlighted as disturbing to the society around him.

In order to characterize Jesus as a magician, the Jews attempt to show that he views himself as above others with access to a higher supernatural power. In the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, Jesus is similarly accused of disturbing the social order with his witchcraft in his trial in front of Pontius Pilate.⁸² A group of Jews accuse Jesus of falsifying his

⁸¹ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVIII, 69-70. “And some said he was a sorcerer: ‘We should see first / Whether he’s dead or not dead before we dare take him down.’” (Translation Robertson and Shepherd).

⁸² It may at first seem odd to glean information about the character of Jesus from the Jews who persecute him because, in a clearly delineated moral world, the Jews are evil, the “bad guys,” so to speak; however, the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and the texts that retell its stories complicate this reading significantly. By presenting the time before Jesus’s Crucifixion, these texts show the social unrest caused by Jesus’s actions and the fear of the community that results in their willingness to crucify Jesus for performing magic while letting a known dangerous criminal go free. Furthermore, the time after Jesus’s crucifixion provides the Jews with an opportunity to continue to investigate his divinity, an opportunity they take. The result of the continued investigation into Jesus’s divinity is that the *Gospel* ends with the *voluntary* conversion of the

parentage and healing people on the Sabbath. Like the fear that Christ will jump off the cross and immediately punish the crowd for its cruelty, these concerns are not frivolous, especially as they would be read in the patri-lineal society of late medieval England. Jesus has said (or his followers have said on his behalf) that he is not the child of two poor Jewish people but of a god, a fact which, if true and provable, would drastically change his social status and threaten the claims to authority of the hierarchical structure around him. First the Jews say that he is not the son of a god but of two people they know:

<p>þis mopp þat merres oure men, kalles him god sun of heuyn his sire, his dam we ken, bi name we kan þam neuyn We wate wele Ioseph was a wright, Suthly he was his sire, and mari vs menes his moder hight we, whatkin goddes er þise?⁸³</p>	<p>this fool that troubles our men, calls himself the son of God in heaven[.] his sire and his dame we know we even know them by name[.] We know well Joseph was a carpenter, truly, he was his sire, and we remember that Mary is his mother's name What kind of gods are these two?</p>
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The Jews' concern is logical in its focus on the evidence—Joseph is a carpenter and Mary was his mother's name, but it does not quite accuse Jesus of anything other than being a fool, troubling the men, and having others call him the son of God. The underlying issue is obviously one of hierarchy, however. The concern is about one who speaks and acts

Jews. These shifting categorizations and allegiances can indicate either that the Jewish people are not presumed to be negative in the way that we have assumed because of their expulsion from England, or they can indicate that magic and witchcraft are not as negative as we have presumed them to be. The texts seem to indicate both, depending on audience and ethos of the speaker.

⁸³ Hulme, *The Middle English Harrowing of Hell*, 24. All quotations are taken from the Galba manuscript unless otherwise noted. Translation mine.

like he is superior to the others around him or refuses to accept the social position into which he has been born.

Jesus is a magician because he performs feats that defy the natural order by healing people and bringing others back from the dead. Pilate's response to the Jews' accusation that Jesus falsifies his parentage is to say that this is not breaking a law and the accused must have broken a law. The Jews respond that he heals the sick on the Sabbath, which is unacceptable because God's law says not to work on the Sabbath.

Jesus's acts of healing are coded as evil because he has done them on the Sabbath day:

Pan wirkes he wonder werkes new, heles al þat askes heleing, þe croked cripilles þat we knew, þis es a wonder thing; he makes þam hale of hide & hew thurgh his fals charmeing ...	Then he proceeds to work new wonders, heals all those who ask to be healed, the crooked cripples that we know, this is a dreadful thing; he makes them whole of skin and color through his false charming ...
for soth slike er his dedes, slike fare he fares withal, with fendes craft he him fedes. ⁸⁴	truthfully such are his deeds, such are the means with which he acts, with the devil's craft he is our enemy.

They accuse him of "false charming," which nonetheless seems to be effective at making all the people who need healing "whole" again, but only of appearance. The fact that Jesus's healing is effective means that he must get his power from a supernatural force, and since they know his parents, Jesus must be working with the fiend. Thus, Jesus is associated with magic and the devil during his lifetime. The miracles that he performs are

⁸⁴ Hulme, 26.

deemed both effective and dangerous. Though Pilate attempts repeatedly to convince the Jews that Jesus is not a dangerous criminal, they are convinced that he must be crucified.

Another magical power Jesus seems to have is the ability to send people prophetic dreams. In addition to the testimony of the Jews, Pilate's wife, Procula, testifies to Pilate that Jesus has sent her a dream to warn her that if Pilate kills Jesus he will be forever remembered as a horrible man. This third accusation of witchcraft is interesting for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that in several of the cycle plays the source of the dream is changed from Jesus to Satan, but here in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, Pilate's wife seems to be trying to protect him and Jesus from the pain of crucifixion and death:

on þe night als ane angell	then in the night as an angel
he appered to pilates wife:	he appeared to Pilate's wife:
unto þi lord þou tell	tell your lord that
he lett noght ihesus life. ⁸⁵	he should not surrender Jesus's life (to the Jews)

It is an angel rather than someone familiar who appears to Procula. Procula's dream shows that Jesus has the power to send out angels to communicate through dreams and prophesy the future. This amazes Pilate who asks the Jews again to reconsider their accusations, but they say that Jesus has bewitched his wife:

Pis wist we are,	Of this we are certain,
ilk man þe suth may se;	this same man the truth may say:
he fares with fendes fare,	he operates through the fiend's craft,
witched þi wife has he. ⁸⁶	he has bewitched your wife.

⁸⁵ Hulme, 34.

⁸⁶ Hulme, 36.

Repeatedly the Jews associate Jesus's work with "fendes fare" or "fendes craft." This slippage between the sources of supernatural power is both important to the reimaginings of these texts and a source of debate in the episodes, which I will discuss further below.

Many of the most anxiety provoking moments in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* are highlighted by the revisions and reinterpretations of this text into other forms. The cycle plays especially show revisions that seem meant to control the interpretation of certain events. For example, the Jews accusation that Jesus refers to himself as the Son of God incorrectly, founded on their knowledge of Mary and Joseph, is placed into the mouth of Sathanas in the Towneley Harrowing of Hell:

Thy fader knew I well be sight,
He was a wright his meett to wyn;
Mary, me mynnys, thi moder hight,

The vtmost ende of all thy kyn.

Say who made the so mekill of myght?⁸⁷

I knew your father well by sight,
He was a carpenter to earn his meat;
Mary, I remember, was your
mother's name

This is the most you can claim for
yourself.

Tell me who made you so mighty?

Putting these words and their very literal and evidence-based approach to Christ's power in the mouth of Sathanas seems to meet an obvious revision goal. If the complaint sounded logical in the mouth of the Jews, surely it will be interpreted as foolish in the mouth of Satan. The same can be said of Procula's dream, sent to her by angels in the *Gospel* translation and sent to her by Satan in the cycles. That the dream is linked with true prophecy and the Annunciation in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and implanted in her

⁸⁷ Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley, Eds., *The Towneley Plays: Volume One Introduction and Text*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, 249-253.

head by Satan in the later works seems to indicate that any sympathy for the Jews or for Pontius Pilate becomes less acceptable as the narrative is revised over the next two hundred years; however, these conclusions are complicated by the various similarities between Christ and Satan throughout the Harrowing narratives.

In these trials, though Jesus speaks only once, his character is clearly constructed by the community around him. He is a magician because he may be born of a god, he heals the sick and brings back the dead, he sends people dreams, and he can perform telekinesis. In the event that the testimony of individuals Pilate knows and respects is not enough to convince him and the audience that Jesus is capable of working magic, even inanimate objects behave strangely around Christ. The response of inanimate objects to Jesus's presence seems to be the event that convinces Pilate that Jesus is special and powerful. He replaces the first set of standard-bearers with "men more mighty, strang and stabill of state" because he wants to be sure that the banners are bowing to Jesus and not drooping from weak arms.⁸⁸ However, even the strong men cannot hold the banners, and Pilate threatens them with the loss of life and land. One of the functions of these scenes is to explore the performance of magic on earth and its reception by society.

The fact that Jesus is characterized as a magician by the community around him shows that his actions were both socially relevant and threatening to the political order. The Harrowing of Hell tradition suggests that medieval writers and readers had a much more complex view of Jews, witches, and rebels than our scholarship currently assumes. We normally think of the Church and the state as being anti-magic and witchcraft and the

⁸⁸ Hulme, 32.

performance of magic and witchcraft as marginalized if not outright rebellious behavior; however, in the Harrowing of Hell narratives, the Jews align with our assumptions about the Church and the state and Christ is the one performing magic and trafficking with demons, making his actions rebellious. The continuing accusations of witchcraft and magic are important because they characterize Jesus as a victim of slander. But the words are used to describe Jesus's works on earth indicate the potential for an inheritance of magical power from Jesus. Furthermore, the practice of magic is presented and it is marginalized rather than central, which opens up the opportunity for marginalized people to take up this inheritance. The Jews have exhausted their vocabulary for describing his crimes: he works wonders, he charms, he bewitches. Since to say that he works miracles is to ally his power with God rather than the fiend, there is no other way to describe his actions. Jesus's work with the fiends then becomes a righteous action, which truly heals, protects, and prophesies. Here at the relative beginning of the Christian myth, we see that working wonders on earth is associated with magic and it is presented as righteous and good even when deemed dangerous by the state. Linking Jesus and magic provides the beginning of a tradition from which other writers and artists can draw to present magic as lawful and appropriately Christian.

Christ's character is so liminal in these Harrowing of Hell narratives that it can sometimes seem blurred into the characters around him. This refusal to clearly differentiate between Christ and man and even Christ and Satan provides an even greater opportunity for affective identification and ritualization. The overall effect of these Harrowing texts is that at all times we are a ritual action away from being like Christ *and*

a ritual action away from being like Satan. Most critics seem to agree that Satan is presented as impotent and powerless in the Harrowing plays. Of Satan, Roberta Mullini writes, "Once deprived of his regality, the character loses whatever awesome charisma he might have had, causing the audience to rejoice at the minor devils' rebellious action and at the chaos now governing the realm of Hell."⁸⁹ Tamburr concurs with Mullini, stating, "Through these changes, the poet makes Satan the true antagonist in the fight against Christ, rather than the unholy trinity of the devil, hell, and death... The poet eliminates the devil's co-rulers to suggest his growing isolation from his own forces and the inherent weakness of evil itself."⁹⁰ And of the Chester cycle, he says, "The dramatist emphasizes Satan's essential weakness by staging the dethronement as a coup by the devil's subordinates, not a humiliation by his superior."⁹¹ While the scenes may be comic to some degree, I contend that the identification with minor devils both through their colloquial speech and through their overthrow of an unjust governor/king is as frightening as it is comedic. The audience is pulled into a situation of absolute slippage as two princes, two systems of governance (dependent upon one another), and at least two heroes appear before them. All identification is dangerous and irresistible in these episodes. All of the implications of Christ's association with magic in the trial scenes are only compounded by the similarities between Christ and Satan once Christ descends into hell. Both are depicted as the bringers of light, both are depicted as Kings or Princes, and Satan is described as a warlock.

⁸⁹ Mullini, "Action and Discourse in The Harrowing of Hell: The Defeat of Evil," 122.

⁹⁰ Karl Tamburr, "From Narrative to Drama: The Transformation of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* in Middle English." *Medieval Perspectives* 16 (2001): 135-150, 138.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 147.

Similar to the aforementioned discussion of Christ's costumes, the description of Christ's coming into hell by the patriarchs solidifies the impression that he brings light into the darkness. The *Gospel of Nicodemus* and the Chester, York, and Towneley cycles begin the Harrowing with a great light from Christ. The descent in the *Gospel* begins:

Al Adams kind we war in hell,
 Ful many a waful wight
 Till on a time it so bifell
 Of sun we had a sight;
 When we in mirknes ware,
 A light gan on vs leme,
 Till vs it semid þare
 Like a bright suns beme.⁹²

All Adam's kind, we were in hell,
 A great many woeful people
 Until, on a time, it so befell
 We had a glimpse of the sunlight;
 When we were in scary darkness,
 A light began to gleam upon us,
 Until it seemed to us
 Like a bright sunbeam.

The poetic image in the *Gospel* uses the pun on the word "sun" to emphasize the holiness of the light. In the cycle plays, the description comes from the patriarchs and serves to describe for the audience what may have been difficult to see in a play staged in full daylight. The Chester cycle begins with Adam's interpretation of the light:

Oh Lord and Sovereign Saviour,
 Our comfort and our counsellor,
 Of this light thou art author
 As I see well in sight.
 This is a sign thou wilt succor
 Thy folks that liven in great languor,
 And of the Devil be conqueror,
 As thou has yore beheight. (1-8)⁹³

(people in great misery)

 (long ago promised)

⁹² Hulme, *Gospel of Nicodemus*, 96.

⁹³ David Mills, Ed. *The Chester Mystery Cycle: A New Edition with Modernised Spelling*. East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1992.

Though there is no “sun,” Adam invokes the same idea with the word “author.” The light becomes a harbinger of the paradise to come. The light as the central image and symbol of the Harrowing plays has been explored as evidence of the goodness and power of Christ, but it has not been connected to the symbol’s history in hell. One of the prime demons in hell, Lucifer’s name means “bringer of light,” a fact emphasized in the Chester version of “The Fall of Lucifer” performed by the tanners. The tanner playing Deus says:

Now Lucifer and Lightburne, looks lowlie you be attendinge!
The blessing of my benignitie I geve to my first operacion:
For crafte ne for cunning cast never comprehendinge,
Exalte you not to exellency in no heighe exaltation.
Loke that you tende righte wislye, for hense I wilbe wending.
The worlde that is both voyde and vayne, I forme in this formation,
With a dungeon of darkenes that never shall have endinge. (45-51)⁹⁴

God tells Lucifer and his chief henchman, Lightborne, to beware of pride and behave themselves while he goes off to create the world. While all the light comes from God, the typology of hell shows the similarities between the two lights he brings into being. Perhaps we fail to notice that the light in hell is reminiscent of the first fallen angel because it does not seem a fitting correlation for the light that appears at the beginning of the Harrowing, but throughout the Harrowing, Jesus seems conscious of the similarities between himself and the leaders of hell.

When he descends to harrow hell, Jesus refers to himself as “rex gloriae” or the King of Glory consistently. The Latin phrase from Psalm 24 that is repeated throughout the different versions is: “Attollite portas, principes, vestras, et elevamini portas

⁹⁴ Happé, *English Mystery Plays*, 52.

aeternales, et introibit rex gloriae.”⁹⁵ In Latin and in English, Christ refers to Satan as a prince. In the *Gospel*, Christ says, “ȝe princes, I bid ȝe opin wide ȝowre endless ȝates here, þe king of blis now in sall glide.”⁹⁶ In the Chester Harrowing, he says, “Open up hell-gates anonne, ye prynces of pyne everychon.” In the York, he says, “Oppen vppe, yoe princes of paynes sere.” In the Towneley, “Ye prynces of hell open youre yate, and let my folk furth gone; A prynce of peasse shall enter therat wheder ye will or none.” The repeated references to kings and princes serves to underscore the parity between Christ and Satan rather than the difference between them, as many critics insist. They use similar methods to fight one another as well. In the Towneley cycle, the Satan, the arch-deceiver tells Ribald he knows all Jesus’s tricks: “I know his trantes fro top to tayll.” Initially this may sound like Satan accusing Christ of something of which he is innocent, however, Christ has tricked Satan into believing he should be allowed in hell because he took on the disguise of mankind. In *Piers Plowman*, Mercy explains:

So shal this deth fordo—I dar my lyf legge—
 Al that Deth dyd furste thorw the Develles entysynge.
 And right as [the gylour] thorw gyle [bigyled man formest],

⁹⁵ Psalm 24 reads: “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods. Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. Selah. *Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.* Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah.” Emphasis on words in Latin above, mine.

⁹⁶ Hulme, *Gospel of Nicodemus*, 108.

So shal grace that bigan [al] make a good [ende
And bigyle the gylour—and that is good]⁹⁷

Mercy explains that Christ uses death to beguile the beguiler; he dies in order to trick Satan into letting him into hell to retrieve the souls of men. Not only are Christ and Satan of similar ranks, they use similar methods to defeat one another. This parity is further emphasized by the debate that happens in hell. In direct confrontation, the prince of peace and the prince of darkness argue about humankind as property. The debate as parity and law as a site for agency for both parties is something I discuss further in Chapter 4. The narratives show a definite slippage between Christ and Satan, and this makes the interpretation of the morality of their acts problematic. The fact that Christ is a trickster and a rebel implicitly condones this behavior in the context of dealing with demons.

The fact that Christ and Satan have such similar statuses and abilities indicates that magic is not the deciding factor in determining good from evil. Magic can be good or bad in these narratives, which may indicate an anxiety surrounds the depictions of magic in books or on stage. Magic and ritual are both neutral in that the subject position of the performer determines the moral valence of the act. Procula's dream is an excellent example of the reinterpretation of a single act: in one case, Jesus sends the dream, in the other, Satan does. Procula's dream also shows that the characters of Christ and Satan become interchangeable in these narratives. The characterization of Christ as a magician indicates that our understanding of witchcraft is highly compartmentalized in a way the

⁹⁷ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVIII.158-162. "So shall this death destroy—I dare bet my life— / All that Death did first through the Devil's tempting. / And just as the beguiler with guile beguiled man first, / So shall grace that began everything make a good end / And beguile the beguiler—and that's a good trick." (Translation Robertson and Shepherd).

pre- and early modern perspective is not. Even in this gospel, however, the works of magic are not presented as unproblematically good. In this translation of the apocryphon, we see a distinction made between true miracles and magic when Nicodemus arrives at Jesus's trial and makes the comparison between the pharaoh's magicians in the time of Moses and the acts that Jesus performs. Nicodemus argues that duration is the test of worthiness and truth in the case of magic. He says of the pharaoh's magicians:

<p>When signes war schewed thurgh vntill pharao þe kyng, two witnes, Iamnes and mambres, did him ful grete hething; signes þat he schewed made þai lese</p> <p>with þaire fals enchaunting, als goddes þam held all hathenes; bot lithes þe last ending; for his dedes war suthfast and þaires bot sorcery; his dedes sall euermore last, and þaires bud nedely dy.⁹⁸</p>	<p>A long time ago when signs were shown as when Pharaoh was king, two witnesses, Jamnes and Mambres, mocked him with their deeds; the proof that [Moses] showed made theirs less</p> <p>with their false enchanting, the heathens thought they were gods; but they were cast down in the end; for [Moses's] deeds were truthful and theirs were but sorcerer's tricks; Moses's deeds last forever, and theirs must necessarily die.</p>
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Nicodemus claims that the works of the pharaoh's magicians, Jamnes and Mambres, only lasted a short time, like a stage magician's tricks might, but that Jesus's works will last forever and thus are true wonderful works and not tricks or conjurings. This distinction between Jesus's works and the works of petty magicians is taken up by many critics as the dominant attitude toward witchcraft in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance.⁹⁹ The

⁹⁸ Hulme, *Gospel of Nicodemus*, 50-52.

⁹⁹ William Kamowski, for example, argues that the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century church that writers like the translator Trevisa and Chaucer would have known was so widely corrupt that writers compared it unfavorably with the miracles of the early church which they thought were genuine and blessed: "Both Wyclif and Chaucer underpin their critiques of the contemporary Church with an ideal of a genuinely

problem with the argument that there is a clear and identifiable distinction between the magical workings of certain groups over others is two-fold. First of all, the fact that these arguments take place within the texts themselves illustrates the possibility of confusion between magical sources and efficacy. Even Nicodemus's argument concerning the durability of righteous works of magic is called into question as soon as Christ enters hell and discusses the "trickery" and "manipulation" of Satan who shape-shifted and tricked Adam and Eve into eating an apple. Satan's magic lasts for centuries, until the Harrowing, in fact. Neither duration, nor credibility of the performer seems to make magic more or less likely logically. Secondly, the early Church seems to already recognize magical shenanigans from the pre-Christian era as separate from genuine works of miracle. Historicizing the use of magic requires recognizing its dualistic, and sometimes, neutral nature from the beginning.

We have seen that Jesus is often referred to as a witch or a magician in his trial scenes before Pilate, and that this characterization is important to the understanding of Jesus as a whole character. Langland emphasizes the "Christ knight" allegory brought up by Tamburr and others by turning the Passion and the Harrowing into a jousting tournament for the prize of "Piers fruit the Plowman," but he also shows this to be a disguise for the magical power of his divinity. The battle Jesus fights on earth is not one of military conquest but of magical death and rebirth. The Jews, though not emulable

empowered early Church, whose efficacy was confirmed by its access to the miraculous. The presumption and chicanery of the contemporary Church's 'miracles,' by contrast, bespeak a spiritual impotence." "Chaucer and Wyclif: God's Miracles against the Clergy's Magic." *The Chaucer Review* 37, no. 1 (2002): 5-25, 6.

characters, are not wrong in saying that Jesus can perform magic, a fact that is made clear repeatedly through the testimony at the trials and in the descent into hell.

Though the Jews were concerned that Christ claimed divinity when they suspected him of being a mere mortal, the devils in hell have the exact opposite problem with Christ: they are upset that he has claimed mortality when he is actually divine. The fiends say to Christ:

Sen þou was man, on what manere was godhede in þe hid? [here] was þou noght ded? What dose þou slike maistris neuer was kyd;	Since you were man, by what manner was your godhead hid within you? Were you not dead? What you did deceitfully made sure your power never showed;
we fendes war all ful fayn in fere	we fiends all joined together in companionship
we þe iews to ded þe did; how ertou put to slike powere, and slike tene vs bytid? þe sawles þat vs war sent has þou won heþin oway, þou has vs schamly schent and priued vs of oure pray. ¹⁰⁰	with the Jews who put you to death; how are you given this remarkable power, and also the ability to approach us this time? The souls that were sent to us you have won away hence, you have shamefully disgraced us and deprived us of our prey.

We can see the inversion of the Jews' complaint here in the demons' complaint that Christ was a man by all outward appearances but managed to hide his relationship to God from them, but we also see that this ability to be both God and man simultaneously is the method through which the harrowing occurs. It is precisely *because* Christ can hide his divinity under his humanity that he can enter hell and save the souls therein. This logical conclusion is referred to as the "bait-and-hook metaphor" by theologians wishing to

¹⁰⁰ Hume, *The Middle English Harrowing of Hell*, 1429-1440.

expound upon the theory of the devil's rights. Several critics have noted theology's continued reliance on deception in defeating the devil through the hook and bait.¹⁰¹ C. W. Marx explains, "The theme of the deception is encapsulated in the imagery of the hook and bait; the hook of Christ's divinity was concealed in the bait of human nature."¹⁰² The idea that God and Christ are colluding to "trick" Satan here has a great many thematic implications concerning what it means to perform magic and treat with the devil, especially when we consider the Genesis/Creation frame of reference with which we started. If Christ and man share the dual nature as human and divine, then at least a part if not the major power behind magic and supernatural agency is exercising that likeness without calling the attention to one's own power that would result in increased defenses. Trickery or deception is a central part of the ritualization, the magical practice. The fact that this is clearly deception, though, does not change the fact that it is still also magic and trafficking with demons. The discovery of trickery can be seen a proto-scientific mental activity: inquiry that leads to revelation. As we will see in the reinterpretations of these texts that are increasingly modern, however, this scientific inquiry and uncovering does not make the action less magical or effective in the supernatural realm.

The issue of Christ's hidden divinity highlights the artificial distinction I have made between Christ's character and the harrowing actions. In the case that Christ simply is both human and divine, this deception hardly seems like an "act" at all. However,

¹⁰¹ See Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), C. W. Marx, *The Devil's Rights and the Redemption in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge, MA: D. S. Brewer, 1995), and R. L. Gates. "The Devil in Christian Tradition and Legend." *The National Review Volume 48* Ed. W.H. Allen (London: Ballantyne & Co., 1907) 123-131 for more information about this image as it was used in theology.

¹⁰² Marx, *The Devil's Rights*, 12.

throughout the Middle English Harrowing of Hell texts and the Renaissance reinterpretations of this central narrative, this deception is depicted as a power, an agency for the harrowing Christ-figure. To explain further, Tamburr notes that the early Harrowing narratives often contain “an extended explanation of how the devil forfeited mankind” and that “Satan swallows like a greedy fish in an image that suggests hell mouth.”¹⁰³ Alister McGrath amusingly elaborates that “The devil, like a great sea monster, snaps at the bait—and then discovers too late, the hook.”¹⁰⁴ There is an implied confusion of agents here, and the devil seems to conveniently damn himself or trick himself into giving up the souls, but as is clear in *Piers Plowman*, Christ sees himself as the one who “beguiles the beguiler.” Furthermore, the extended fishing metaphor is doubly appropriate in the case of the harrowing when the hook can snare the demons who are confused about Christ’s identity, but it also brings back the flesh of all the men the devil has been hoarding since the creation of mankind. Just as the fiends note, Christ’s hook “priued” them of their “pray.” If Christ is the hook-and-bait, then there is a seriously powerful agent who is holding the fishing pole. This is the power that the harrowing Christ-figure aligns himself or herself with when he or she chooses to complete harrowing actions.

¹⁰³ Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England*, 20.

¹⁰⁴ McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 105.

Christ's Harrowing Actions

In this section, I outline the harrowing actions that occur over and over again in the dealing with evil through the late Middle Ages and into the Renaissance in literary texts. In addition to the previously mentioned trickery and deceit, these actions include arguing with the use of legal rhetoric and performing legal negotiations; breaking down gates and defeating evil through military action; and forgiving and rescuing people who have suffered.

Christ's power over Satan is, at least in part, displayed as rhetorical skill. Perhaps more than the others, this skill is easily ritualized because of the focus on education and the rise of classical rhetorical education in the Renaissance. These words and the formation of words and arguments have lasting power in the mundane and in the supernatural world: they are, in fact, actions. This understanding of the Harrowing, while not entirely new, complicates readings of the Middle Ages as militaristic and physical and the early modern period as rhetorical and intellectual.¹⁰⁵ The Harrowing Christ the early modern authors inherit is *already* rhetorical and intellectual in his defeat of evil. The *Gospel of Nicodemus* gives Jesus so few lines that the debate scene is more implied than it is enacted. The texts that draw from the *Gospel*, however, often expand this debate scene considerably, highlighting the words as actions. The Digby *Harrowing of Hell* is one of the earlier examples. In this verse play, Satan first tells the audience:

¹⁰⁵ Several critics have noted the primacy of the debate in the Harrowing of Hell scene. See Tamburr, Howard, and Anderson and Lieblein cited above.

Wo is þat ich here þere?
Ne red ich him speken na more,
He may nou so muchel do,
Þat he sal ous comen to
To ben houre fere
And witen how we pleyeþ here.¹⁰⁶

Who is that I hear there?
I advise him to stop speaking,
He may now do so much,
That he shall come [to our house]
To be our companion
And know how we act here.

The emphasis on words here is enlightening. Satan advises Christ to stop speaking because it is through speech that one can enter hell and know how the demons “pleyeþ.” Christ responds in kind:

Stille be þu lording,
Þat ich here geden þere;
Ich rede þat þou ne speke na more,
Þou miȝt wel witen bi mi play
Þat ich wile hauen mine away.¹⁰⁷

Be still, lording,
That I cry out to here
I advise that you speak no more,
You might well know by my action
That I will take what is mine away.

What is perhaps most striking is the echoing of the same phrases. Satan uses the words “Ne red ich” and then Christ uses the same words “Ich red.” Both characters speak to each other as counselors: I advise you. Though it seems that words are contrasted with action in both accounts, the words effect the action. The advice giving (“red ich” / “Ich rede”) is in advance of the doing (“we pleyeþ”/ “mi play”), but the words also cause damnation in the first case and they provoke the harrowing in the second. Thus, this short verse play begins by showing how the use of words is a emulable ritual activity that can lead to harrowing evil.

¹⁰⁶ Hume, Digby Harrowing of Hell, p. 6, 47-52. Translation mine.

¹⁰⁷ Hume, Digby, 54-58.

Simply giving advice and threatening action does not make for a debate, but Christ and Satan use juridical logic and provide reasons for their claims. Both characters display an understanding of the rhetoric taught in educational institutions. Tamburr notes:

Most of the debates between Christ and Satan in literary works on the Harrowing of Hell use the form of *disputatio*...[they] repeat the pattern of question-proposition-objection-determination.¹⁰⁸

Though it may seem that this use of rhetoric on the stage might seem off-putting to uneducated audiences, on a scale where the complex formulations of astrology and mathematicians are the magic of alchemy and the debate over legal rights is the magic of Christ, Christ's actions become much more emulable in the case of needing to confront a demon. Furthermore, the repetition of the debate gave the audience members continued opportunity to memorize and internalize the points of argument. For example, Satan presents his evidence for his right to Adam's soul and the souls of all Adam's kin:

Adam þe hountrie com me to,
Mani redes he gan me do;
ffor an appel þat ich gaf him
He is min and al is cun.¹⁰⁹

Adam came to me hungry,
He asked for my counsel;
For an apple that I gave to him
He is mine and all his kin.

The implicit question behind Satan's proposition is "Do the men here belong to you, Satan?" Satan's proposition is that the men and women in hell belong to him because Adam came to him asking for food and received food and advice that bound him to Satan for all eternity. Instead of pointing out Satan's lie here (it is actually Eve and not Adam,

¹⁰⁸ Tamburr, *Harrowing of Hell*, 125.

¹⁰⁹ Hume, Digby, 77-80.

no one asks for advice), Jesus gives a different objection based on property. Jesus counters that Satan cannot give away property that is not his, and he certainly cannot use property that is not his to bind people to him through debt:

Satanas, hit was min, þe appel þat þou 3eue him, þe appel and þe appeltre, Boþen veren maked þoru me; Hou miȝtest þou in eni cunnes wyse	Satan, it was mine, The apple that you gave him, The apple and the apple tree, Both were made through me; How might you by any manner of means
Of oþer monnes þing maken merchaundise?	Of other men's things make merchandise? ¹¹⁰

The objection is not even that Satan used deceit; instead, Christ argues that Satan never owned the apple or the apple tree and therefore could not use it in exchange. The concept of ownership and exchange becomes very important in the reinterpretations of the Harrowing when the question of who owns what soul and who can sacrifice or make a payment with a soul is a crucial issue. Christ here also emphasizes Satan's cunning and his trickery which highlights his response (hiding his godhead under his manhood) as appropriate and just. The determination of this *disputatio* is obvious: Christ retrieves the souls.

Another text that expands the debate between Christ and Satan is *Piers Plowman*. In this text, the debate scene is actually framed within another debate scene between the four daughters of God who also argue about whether or not Christ will be able to leave hell with the souls of the patriarchs. The layers of debate and verbal construction of the

¹¹⁰ Hume, Digby, 81-86.

truth indicate that Langland saw this method of harrowing as particularly powerful.

William Birnes argues that Langland's emphasis on the law has a specific historical context in the development of the new English Chancery Law, but his characterization of Christ as a legal advocate remains important throughout the Harrowing reinterpretations.

He writes:

Christ becomes the personification of law operating for stability and order. This image of the law-abiding monarch signals the fusion of temporal and divine laws and is the center of the legal metaphor of *Piers Plowman*.¹¹¹

Birnes's explains the importance of the law to the social order in this Harrowing text by showing how Christ is both a monarch and one who follows the law. The connection between governance and law and the Harrowing can hardly be overstated. Throughout the theological debates over Christ's descent into hell and the literary reinterpretations of the Harrowing texts, law and order are central to the importance of the Harrowing tradition. In addition to presenting himself as a monarch who follows the laws, Christ's presentation of rhetorical skill is also emulable to laypeople and commoners. As we can see in *Piers Plowman*, Christ argues like a lawyer:

Lo, here my soule to amendes
For alle synneful soules, to save tho that ben worthy,
Myne thei be and of me—I may the bette hem clayme.
Although Resoun recorde, and right of myself,
That if thei ete the apple alle shulde deye,
I bihyghte hem nought here helle for evere.
For the dede that thei dede, thi deceyte it made;

¹¹¹ William J. Birnes, "Christ as Advocate: The Legal Metaphor of *Piers Plowman*." *Annuaire Mediaevale* 16 (1975): 71-93, 71-72.

With gyle thow hem gete agayne al resound.
For in my paleys Pradys, in persone of an adder,
Falseliche thow fettest there thyng that I loved.
Thus ylyke a lusarde with a lady visage
Thevelich thow me robbedest; the Olde Lawe graunteth
That gylours be bigiled, and that is gode resoun.¹¹²

The rhetorical move here is also a claim followed by reasons. Christ says he has a better claim to the souls of mankind because God made them in his likeness and that even though Reason made death the payment for the eating of the apple, it was not meant to be an eternal punishment because they were tricked into eating the apple rather than choosing it freely. Interestingly, though Christ defeats Satan in his rhetorical battle: he also pays him. In the contract between God, Satan, and man that occurs in Genesis, Christ serves as the payment to appease God's wrath, but he also offers his body to Satan to torture. The hook and bait theory emphasizes the fact that he regains it, that it does not remain in hell with Satan, but this is a concession that Christ makes on behalf of mankind. Just as in the Digby Harrowing, Christ emphasized Lucifer's deceit in order to highlight his own righteousness in the face of that deceit. He begins with payment and ends with the idea that he should not have had to pay for the souls anyway since Satan should not have tricked them. The outcome though is still some sort of exchange. Christ retrieves the souls, but he has also entered hell and dealt with Satan face to face, a fact that is important in modeling appropriate behavior when confronting demons. One may

¹¹² Langland, *Piers Plowman*, XVIII.327-338. "Lo, here's my soul in payment / For all sinful souls, to save those that are worthy, / Mine they are and of me—I may the better claim them. / Although Reason records, and right of myself, / That if they ate the apple all should die, / I did not hold out to them hell here forever. / You got them with guile against all reason / For in my palace Paradise, in the person of an adder, / Thus like a lizard with a lady's face / Falsely you filched from me; the Old Law confirms / That guilders be beguiled, and that is good logic." (Translation Robertson and Shepherd).

not be able to avoid this kind of confrontation, but one can argue one's way out of remaining with Satan in hell. We can see this ritualization in all of the Renaissance texts discussed further in the next chapters, but it is especially true that Faustus relies on a kind of juridical rhetoric to harrow Mephistopheles and Lucifer and that Paulina uses words to conscribe the tyrannical power of Leontes. In Chapter 3, Spenser depicts Night as arguing for her rights to the hearts and souls of men in a way that presumes a dualistic universe and problematizes the acceptance of Christ's use of rhetoric in the Harrowing. The Harrowing makes this activity possible by binding Satan's powers and making him incapable of simply stealing Christ's spoils back from him.

Christ's rhetorical ability is complimented by his brute force and is represented by two separate but related actions: breaking down gates and binding Satan. This force is often connected to military prowess in the medieval texts, but in Renaissance texts the specific action of breaking down gates or demanding entry is a reminder of the Harrowing of Hell, especially as it was staged in the cycles.¹¹³ In some cases, Christ breaks down the gates and then argues with Satan, but in other cases he argues with Satan over the rights to the souls in hell before he breaks down the gates. In either case, the display of military power or force is generally the culmination of Christ's powers. This dramatic display of strength is the hook underneath the bait of frail humanity. In the N-Town play, the breaking of the gates is the central action of "The Harrowing of Hell (Part I)." Anima Christi says:

¹¹³ For discussion of this ritual enacted in "porter scenes," see Chapter 5, specifically the section on Paulina's Porter Scene.

Here comyth now þe Kynge of Glorye,
These gatys for to breke.
Ȝe develys þat arn here withinne,
Helle gatys ȝe xal vnpyne.
I xal delyvere mannys kynne;
From wo I wole hem wreke.¹¹⁴

Here comes the King of Glory now,
To break these gates
You devils that are here within,
Hell gates you shall unpin.
I shall deliver man's kin;
From the woe you made them suffer.

Here, in one of the shortest renditions of the Harrowing, the soul of Christ simply says the gates will be broken and they are. The devils seem compelled to unlock the gates at Christ's bidding. What is most interesting to me about the fact that this particular aspect of the Harrowing of Hell is so ritualized and identifiable even to audiences who have not seen cycle plays in years and years is the emphasis gates place on *permeable* boundaries. These permeable boundaries and the ritual crossing thereof occurs in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* when Archimago sends the sprite to wake Morpheus through the gates, and in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* when Paulina rescues baby Perdita from the dungeon. I have argued throughout this chapter that Christ is a liminal figure who crosses boundaries, but it is equally important to note that what becomes the symbol of the Harrowing for future generations is this dramatic destruction of a boundary. Herein lies the subversive potential for ritualizing the Harrowing. Because the Harrowing Christ is emulable for a wide variety of people, the action of forcibly breaking through boundaries becomes a possible symbol for righteous rebellion and even social and political power.

Christ and Satan are presented not as equals in ability but as having similar statuses in the Harrowing texts, and for that reason the Harrowing tradition complicates

¹¹⁴ Stephen Spector, Ed., *The N-Town Play Cotton MS Vespasian D.8: Volume I Introduction and Text*. EETS (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991), 27-32.

any reading that attempts to put it in the service of institutions or groups. The blurred lines and roles only become clear through the actions that conscribe the forces of evil. Thus the binding of Satan is not meant to represent complete freedom from evil for man for all eternity; rather, it is meant to present the best possible method for limiting the power of evil in one's life. Mankind's refusal to participate in Satan's schemes, his willingness to understand Christ's rhetoric as representing the truth of their own lives, the correct conclusion of exegetical logic is what metaphorically binds Satan in reinterpretations of the Harrowing. In the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the action of binding Satan is brief but effective:

<p>þan ihesus sone toke satanas, þat are was lord and sire, and him in thralldom bunden has to brin in endless fire.¹¹⁵</p>	<p>Then Jesus, Son, took Satan, that was Lord and Sire of this realm, and he bound him in thralldom To burn in endless fire.</p>
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Jesus simply takes Satan, binds him, and throws him into a pit where he will burn in endless fire. This binding is also present in each cycle play because it shows the audience that evil can be contained and actively resisted by refusing to engage in Satan's logic or participate in his activities. Christ's power is emphasized throughout the Harrowing of Hell narratives, and this often minimized action might seem anti-climactic to modern audiences, but it symbolizes the end of the debate and the reassertion of the correct and appropriate order. More importantly, it shows the audience that they are capable of confronting evil and avoiding hell. We can see similar bindings in the Renaissance

¹¹⁵ Hume, *The Middle English Harrowing of Hell*, 1441-1444.

retelling of the Harrowing, like when Paulina coerces Leontes into celibacy until she can choose his wife (discussed further in Chapter 5), and more militaristically, when the Empress returns to her home country and uses fire to corral the ships of her former king's enemies in order to gain their submission (discussed further in Chapter 6). In these bindings we see the agency involved in limiting the plans and machinations of evil forces.

The final and most emotional harrowing action is Christ's forgiveness of Adam and his willingness to rescue Adam from the torments of hell. I began this chapter by discussing the emotional and intellectual elements of the contract between God and Satan and mankind that are present in Genesis, and throughout I have argued that Christ's role in the Harrowing is to make right that conflict. Though in many ways what is most important to recognize in this tradition is the powerful, magical aspects of the debate because these are the aspects of the Harrowing Christ that have been forgotten over time, it would do a disservice to the impact of the narrative on audiences to not emphasize the joy and relief that the reunion of Christ with the patriarchs and prophets is meant to evoke. In one of his very few lines in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, Christ recognizes Adam and the patriarchs as his children:

Ihesus þan spac with voice ful clere
to þe sayntes þat he has soght:
'cumes vnto me, my childer dere,
þat my liknes war wroght;

Jesus then spoke with a full, clear
voice
to the saints that he sought in hell:
Come unto me, my dear children,
that in my likeness were made;

þe þat for syn war presond here,
to blis þe sall be broght.¹¹⁶

you that were imprisoned here for
your sin,
to bliss you shall be brought.

The important element of this doctrinally is, of course, the forgiveness of sins and the removal of barrier between man and God's love, but what is also interesting is that here in this moment Christ notes the likeness between mankind and himself. If being in hell is the most carnal, fleshly state possible in the cosmos, then Christ recognizes the prophets and patriarchs here as being made in his image, a detail that emphasizes Christ *and* man's dual role as mortal and divine. His literal pulling them out of hell also symbolizes a movement from this low, carnal place to a high, exalted one, another type of mobility that is potentially subversive when given over to the people in general. Christ leads Adam by the hand out of hell:

By þe right hand gan he adam take
and blisced him right þare,
he led him fro þat lathly lake
and all þat with him ware.¹¹⁷

He took Adam by the right hand
and blessed him right there,
he led him from that loathsome lake
and all that with him were.

The image of Christ leading the souls out of hell was iconic in medieval representations of the Harrowing, and the message of forgiveness must have been both comforting and humbling for believers. The equalizing potential of these scenes, the reminders that man is made in God's image and has agency in these supernatural situations, would also be empowering. The binding of Satan is in part important because it places the responsibility

¹¹⁶ Hume, *The Middle English Harrowing of Hell*, 1477-1482.

¹¹⁷ Hume, *The Middle English Harrowing of Hell*, 1513-1516.

for redemption back on to the believer because one does not automatically go to hell for original sin any longer; reparations can be made and the fight against evil can be fought and won by the individual believer rather than by Christ.

The ritualization of Christ's actions in the Harrowing does not begin in the Renaissance, of course. In part, the process of Catholic canonization is to prove the successful ritualization of Christ's actions here on earth. The requirement of miracles is a nod to the supernatural agency that following in Christ's actions provided. Several medieval religious texts depict characters performing the actions of Christ. Tamburr explains:

This typology of rescue readily lends itself to Old English homilies and saints' lives where the hero as an *imitation Christi* delivers his followers from the power of their heathen captors.¹¹⁸

What becomes new and different about the texts in the Renaissance is that, picking up on the many facets of Christ's character, authors depict a wide variety of characters as having the ability to imitate Christ with effective results. Emulating Christ in the Harrowing then becomes a way of enacting leadership skills and righteous behavior that helps authors depict powerful characters who might otherwise be marginalized, recusants, peasants, and women. All that is necessary for these characters to become figures of Christ is the need for supernatural agency to confront and contain the forces of evil. Later authors make the connection between the Harrowing Christ and their characters clear by emphasizing the similarities in motivation. Characters who present altruistic motivations

¹¹⁸ Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England*, 22.

for their actions, especially when these actions are self-sacrificial, can be profitably read as Harrowing Christ figures who use the harrowing actions of rhetorical debate, physically crossing boundaries, and redeeming friends or family to oppose diabolical forces. In the next four chapters I discuss early modern literary texts that reimagine the Harrowing of Hell and provide us with just such figures. As the Harrowing moves out of the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, however, it becomes a much more debatable doctrine in light of the Protestant Reformation in England, and these representations of magic and ritual become a part of the debate about whether or not Christ's descent into hell is a necessary and appropriate belief for an early modern English subject.

CHAPTER III

“HE THAT THE STUBBORNE SPRITES CAN WISELY TAME”: THE VILLAINS WITH SUPERNATURAL AGENCY

The quest to the realm of the dead is, of course, not unique to Christianity. Journeys to the underworld are as old as literature itself...In most of these tales, the journey to the underworld is part of a larger quest by the hero to overcome death either by surviving his ordeal, rescuing someone confined below, or triumphing in some way over the forces there. It is easy to see how the Harrowing of Hell draws on these myths and legends. Like these heroes, Christ's power extends beyond this world and triumphs over death and the spirits associated with it. It is not surprising then that Christian commentators in the late Middle Ages and especially in the Renaissance would allegorize these classical tales so that, for example, Hercules' snatching Cerberus out of Hades became a type for Christ's drawing Adam out of hell.

—Karl Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England*¹¹⁹

I begin in this chapter to discuss the ways that Renaissance authors reimagine and rework the Harrowing of Hell narratives in order to represent varying subjects' agency within the cosmic order and the state of their own soul and salvation. In the intervening time between the performance of the cycle plays of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and the publication of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* in 1591, official positions and attitudes toward religion changed frequently and drastically. The Protestant Reformation in England, which may be said to be the end result of all these changes or the non-linear movement from Roman Catholicism to Anglicanism, influenced the

¹¹⁹ Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England*, 1-2.

understanding of the doctrine behind the Harrowing of Hell and the literary representations that reinterpreted it. Throughout this dissertation I argue that Renaissance authors like Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, and Margaret Cavendish draw on the medieval tradition of the Harrowing of Hell and participate in theological debates by depicting Christ-figures performing various feats in order to revive or create anew the subject's power to deal with spirits in their everyday lives and muster a greater sense of control over their own salvation in a society increasingly focused on predestination rather than sacramental ritual. Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* also revises the Harrowing of Hell in multiple episodes in Book 1; however, unlike Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Cavendish, Spenser does not write episodes in which a sympathetic or emulable character relies on his or her own power to defeat demonic powers. In *Doctor Faustus*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Blazing World*, Faustus, Paulina, and the Empress are figures of Christ with whom both early-modern and modern audiences could identify or at least sympathize. Spenser, on the other hand, multiplies the Christ-figures in his text to bring the concept of the Harrowing and its focus on agency and ritual into question. Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene* neither clearly condemns nor valorizes Christ's descent into hell, but it raises questions about the necessity and effectiveness of such an action. I begin this exploration of Renaissance reinterpretations of the Harrowing of Hell with Spenser's *Faerie Queene* because, in addition to being the earliest of the literary texts I explore in this dissertation, Book 1 of the *Faerie Queene* also depicts the transition between Catholicism and Protestantism allegorically but not without the rich complexities that provide excellent context for the Harrowing's translation in early

modern literature. Spenser embeds his reimaginings of the Harrowing of Hell in a capacious narrative about what it means to be English and Protestant at the end of the sixteenth century.

The shift between Protestant and Catholic religious beliefs also brought about concurrent changes in the understanding of how the mundane and supernatural worlds interacted with one another and how human beings might interact with both. By depicting characters that effectively intervene in the laws of the natural world, send and retrieve spirits from the supernatural world, and align themselves with the highest powers of the cosmic order, Spenser's multiple harrowings show the interrelatedness of the discourses of religion, science, and magic. Douglas Trevor argues that Spenser suggests "that the pursuit of materialist explanations of one's actions can lead one into a (spiritually) unhealthy quagmire in which personal conduct is ignored in favor of humoral scapegoating."¹²⁰ Implicit in Trevor's suggestion is the idea that what one believes about the materiality of the body and the spirituality of the soul is directly related to how one explains one's own actions, or his or her agency. In other words, how one defines magic and religion and science and whether or not one sees them as separate or deeply imbricated with one another influences the kind of power one can conceive of having in the natural and supernatural worlds. The tradition of the Harrowing of Hell gives early modern readers and writers a model of an agent who is powerful in both worlds simultaneously. Reading Book 1 through the lens of the Harrowing of Hell complicates

¹²⁰ Douglas Trevor, "Sadness in The Faerie Queene" in *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson, Eds. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 240-52, 242.

Trevor's idea that Spenser clearly presents these discourses in a hierarchical fashion because in the Harrowing, Christ is characterized as having power over both worlds equally and is therefore scientist, magician, and symbol of the cosmic order. Since Christ is the consummate model for the self and the harrowing actions are easily ritualized (as discussed in Chapter 2), the characters who descend into hell and model their behavior on his cannot simply be dismissed as immoral and unnecessary to the framework of Spenser's commitment to advancing Elizabethan Protestantism.

Even the association with witchcraft cannot be read as obvious and automatic damnation in texts that fictionalize the doctrine of Christ's descent because Christ is presented as a magician. Stuart Clark notes that though Protestants and Catholics agreed that witchcraft was trafficking with the devil, it did not stop them from associating this action with the opposing church viewpoint:

Agreeing, for the most part, on what witchcraft *was*, Protestants and Catholics were still free to identify it in each other's church—indeed, not only free but desperately eager. This is another feature of early modern religious life that might seem almost too obvious to deserve record. Without doubt, much of what was said was sloganizing and name-calling, but it was so widespread, so endemic in the discourse of religious difference, that it must be seen as constitutive of what opponents thought of each other, and not merely a decorative addition... To *be* a Protestant or a Catholic was thus, in part, to have precisely this view of one's foes.¹²¹

Clark suggests that conceiving of one's self as a good Protestant is dependent upon characterizing Catholics as witches, further emphasizing the idea that these discourses were interchangeable once the names were changed. However, it seems difficult to

¹²¹ Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 534.

believe that early modern audiences, both readers and listeners, would not recognize the interchangeability of this invective and the slippage it created. Protestants, more so than Catholics, had identifiable features to point to connect the practice of Catholicism with magic. Those identifiable features were the rituals that relied on objects like books and beads just as the alchemical knowledge that was also widely associated with demons did. For this reason, newly Protestant churches, like the Church of England whose “doctrinal beliefs are neither orthodoxly Lutheran nor Calvinist,” were anxious about incorporating ritual into their religious practice.¹²²

While too much ritual would clearly lead to Catholicism, too little was also unacceptable. Claire McEachern explains:

Indeed, a church without ritual is invisible, and while the invisible church may have served well as an ideal of an international Protestantism, it was no model for the exigencies of local national practice. The question for any church was not whether ritual, but what degree of ritual?¹²³

Because ritual made religious practice legible and enforceable, a nation that wanted to make adherence to its state religion an identifiable feature of its subjects needed some ritual. Thus if ritual was necessary to show that one was adhering to the mandates of the state and being a good Protestant *and* ritual was indistinguishable from magic that was efficacious in changing the outcomes of both natural and supernatural situations, the identity of an Englishmen teeters precariously on appropriate performance of that ritual. It is precisely this context which Spenser’s text exposes and explores in ways that later

¹²² Trevor, “Sadness in The Faerie Queene,” 240.

¹²³ McEachern, *The poetics of English nationhood, 1590-1612*, 49.

reinterpretations of the Harrowing of Hell do not. The Harrowing of Hell provided a set of rituals that were not readily identifiable with the Catholic mass, and the continued acceptance of the doctrine of Christ's descent eventually made the ritualization of harrowing actions less anxiety-provoking for moderate Protestant members of the Church of England; however, in Spenser's text this anxiety is still present and motivates the multiplicity of harrowings.

One of the ways that Spenser calls harrowings into question is to combine the Christian and Classical traditions in troubling ways. In the epigraph above, Karl Tamburr notes that the association between the heroic Christ of the Harrowing and the epic heroes of classical literature is unsurprising, perhaps because of the medieval and early modern emphasis on reading both the Bible and a variety of Greek and Roman texts. Tamburr's assertions concerning the Harrowing are not wholly unproblematic in their characterization of the Renaissance attitude toward the classics of ancient Greece or Rome, however, because the pre-Christian or pagan past could serve as a model for appropriate behavior only insofar as that behavior can be adapted to the Christian present. Though texts by the pre-Christian authors beloved by many clergy-scholars were often referred to as "handmaidens" to the Bible or worthy of study for political reasons, authors like Edmund Spenser create characters and narratives that place the Christian and the pre-Christian uneasily together. The characters based on classical texts are never as emulable or heroic as their Reformed counterparts. Obvious examples include the ones I discuss in this chapter. Redcrosse Knight, or St. George, is a figure of Christ in his harrowing of Una's kingdom from the terror of the Satan-like dragon. Arthur also harrows Orgoglio's

castle in order to free Redcrosse from its dungeon. These positive characters are placed before the reader as models for behavior—an idea made abundantly clear by Spenser’s claim that he wrote *The Faerie Queene* to “fashion a gentlemen.”¹²⁴ However, in Book 1 of Spenser’s romance/epic, three other characters deal more literally with hell than either Redcrosse or Arthur, and they are rewarded in this world for their efforts to subdue or control another. One might argue that these characters, Archimago, Duessa, and Night, are demons themselves or figures of Satan, but their negotiations with the underworld show that they are actually serving similar functions to Christ in the Harrowing. Their presence in Spenser’s Protestant epic confronts but does not make peace with the lack of supernatural agency afforded by the reformed church’s reliance on faith alone.

The previous chapter argued that the Harrowing of Hell texts of the Late Middle Ages participated in a kind of ritualization that encouraged subjects to identify with and model their lives on Christ’s life, death, and life after death. These texts depicted Christ as a powerful magician, and this depiction changes the way scholars understand the agency of the magician in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. While Tamburr describes the Harrowing of Hell as becoming “superfluous and easier to dismiss” during the Reformation because Calvin and other theologians and writers “highlight Christ’s victory over the devil and his redemption of humanity within the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the Last Judgment,” the Harrowing of Hell remained an important context (by blending both religiosity and entertaining narrative) for literary endeavors because it

¹²⁴ Edmund Spenser, “Letter of the Authors expounding his whole intention in the course of this work” *The Faerie Queene*. Ed. A. C. Hamilton. (Pearson Education, 2007), 714.

explored issues of personal agency and theology that continued to trouble English subjects into the Restoration.¹²⁵ There is abundant theological evidence to show that the English continued to discuss the issue of Christ's descent throughout the seventeenth century, including continued pamphlets and sermons. Furthermore, translations of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* were still being published as late as 1775. Though Tamburr's book focuses specifically on medieval literature, his final chapter discusses Spenser's treatment of the Harrowing narrative. Tamburr argues that Spenser uses the Harrowing "as an allegory for the triumph of Protestant England over Roman Catholicism," and that he "avoids any controversy about it by allegorizing the action towards levels other than the Christological."¹²⁶ Tamburr, like Renaissance scholars who also note Spenser's reinterpretation of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and the descent, sees the association as primarily positive, linking both Redcrosse Knight and Arthur with Christ in a way that heightens the religious aspects of Spenser's romance. I contend that Spenser's use of the Harrowing topos does exactly the opposite: it problematizes a simple understanding of Protestantism as more effective than or victorious over Catholicism. In this chapter, I argue that Archimago and Night embody the Protestant concerns over the Harrowing of Hell as doctrine, especially the close association of Christ with a magician and the danger of interacting with demons directly.

Critics who have linked the Harrowing of Hell to Spenser's text argue that the Harrowing presents a more appealing Christ for literary texts because he is so much more

¹²⁵ Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England*, 173.

¹²⁶ Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell*, 181 and 183.

active. Carol Kaske notes, “The Harrowing of Hell gives Christ a chance to battle like a knight. Medieval men retold this apocryphal story endlessly in literature and art—probably because it satisfied their well-known predilection for violence, whereas the Christ portrayed in the gospels must have seemed something of a doormat.”¹²⁷ Kaske is especially interested in Spenser’s use of the Harrowing to connect the genre of medieval, chivalric romance with Christian goals and aims. Similarly, Christopher Bond connects Arthur and Guyon as Christ figures who harrow their less-god-like companions. Of Guyon, he writes:

Spenser associates Guyon with the Christ of the Bible Who redeemed mankind, with the Christ of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* Who descended into Hell to outwit the devil, and with the Christ of *Piers Plowman* Who jousted in Piers’ arms...To recognize these associations is to understand Spenser’s confidence in the degree to which human nature was capable of contributing to its own redemption, a confidence appropriate for a poet who began his work with a declared agenda of moral instruction.¹²⁸

Bond’s claim takes Kaske’s one step further, arguing that Spenser not only uses the Harrowing narrative to make Arthur and Guyon more heroic in their combatting religious foes but also extends that sense of agency to the reader who is also empowered to enact his or her own redemption. This claim ignores the historical context of the debates over

¹²⁷ Carol V. Kaske. “Introduction.” *The Faerie Queene, Book One*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), xxvii. Kaske is certainly right to point out that the Harrowing Christ is much more active and vibrant than the suffering victim of the Passion; however, the Harrowing Christ is not necessarily violent, certainly not comparatively to the heroes of Romances. He breaks down gates and binds Satan, but his main feat in hell is verbal, rhetorical. Both medieval and early modern subjects recognized and valorized that non-violent defeat in their literature. The over-simplification of the medieval subject is complicated as examination of the Harrowing texts that cross the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries shows that a rhetorically-skilled Christ was appealing to the audiences watching Christ debate with Satan in a cycle play and Redcrosse debates not at all with the dragon he defeats outside of Eden’s gates in the first book. If anything, the Renaissance depiction of that particular harrowing is more violent.

¹²⁸ Bond, “Medieval Harrowings of Hell and Spenser’s House of Mammon,” 190-191.

Christ's descent and the multiple Harrowings in Spenser's first book.¹²⁹ The larger context shows Spenser's conflicted view of human agency that appears as a logical outgrowth of the theological debates on the whole. Human agency is not in any way an uncomplicated good force in Book 1, and this ambivalence is simply an indication of the complex attitudes toward the will that emerge during the Protestant Reformation. Cynthia Marshall notes that in this period "goodness" was paradoxically linked to performing the submission of one's will to another:

In contrast to popular Western conceptions today, authenticity or goodness in early modern England was not a matter of asserting one's 'self' (or, in the odd popular phrase one's 'real self') but of accomplishing acts of submission to one's social superiors, to political authorities, and ultimately to God. Holding onto one's autonomy suggested sinful pride.¹³⁰

The idea that is central to this conception of the self for the Harrowing is "acts of submission" that can be performed to show one's allegiance to a particular social or cosmic order. This conflicting agency is a site of anxiety for Spenser and his contemporaries because the relationship between man and Satan (his adversary) explored through the Harrowing complicates the early modern political hierarchy and the need to submit to aristocratic authority. Satan is both a fallen angel and the Prince of Darkness, titles which give him social standing on almost any mortal, but at least until the Protestant Reformation, men and women were encouraged to defy him and to perform rituals to keep him at bay. The fasting and prayer encouraged for dealing with demonic forces after

¹²⁹ Bond does mention Adam Hill's pamphlet on Christ's descent (discussed further in the Marlowe chapter) at the end of his article, but his focus is on continued belief in the descent rather than the philosophical underpinnings of the arguments surfacing through the theological debate.

¹³⁰ Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self*, 2002, 21.

the Protestant Reformation could seem like performing submission to the wrong superior. The depictions of legal and political hierarchy in the Harrowing of Hell texts the early modern people inherited from their Catholic past encourage rebellion and an act of free will that would counteract the one enacted at the Fall. Spenser shows action and the free will from which it springs to be complicating factors for a life led by faith alone because altogether too often action is evil or self-serving and inaction is the only way to salvation in the new Protestant system.

Spenser's anxiety about human agency becomes quite clear when looking at the harrowings in Book 1 that have been more widely acknowledged by critics. Matthew Fike's analysis of the heroic main characters and their various descents, for example, further supports the idea that Spenser had read, heard, or saw Christ harrow hell in medieval sources. Likewise, Fike notes the coexistence and perhaps interdependence of Spenser's text on both Christian and Classical sources:

The presence of underworlds provides unity between Books I and II: classical set pieces below the House of Pride and within Mammon's cave, and numerous episodes that echo Christ's harrowing of hell—Redcrosse's victory over Error, Arthur's rescue of Redcrosse from Orgoglio's dungeon, the dragon fight, Guyon's three-day journeys through Mammon's cave and to the Bower of Blisse, and his victory over Acrasia. Classical and Christian paradigms are equally present in Spenser's imagination and are sometimes blended. In Book II, for example, Guyon enters the Bower through an ivory gate, which appropriately recalls the gate of false dreams through which Aeneas exits the underworld in *Aeneid* 6; and the knight then casts a net over Acrasia, much as Christ binds Sin and Death in the harrowing of hell tradition.¹³¹

¹³¹ Fike, "Britomart and the Descent into Hell," 13.

Fike's argument regarding Redcrossee, Guyon, Arthur, and even Britomart as Christ-figures harrowing hell supports the claims I make about Faustus, Paulina, and the Empress in the following chapters; however, it does not take into account the obviously contradictory and troubling harrowings Spenser presents in Book 1.¹³² Even though he mentions Guyon's entrance into the bower through an ivory gate, he does not connect that to the ivory gate the spirit slips through on Archimago's orders in Book 1. What are we to make of the fact that the spirit and Guyon share a violent harrowing of a hellspace? One character is presented as the demonic lackey of a Catholic magician and the other is our hero of Book 2. The Harrowing narrative's emphasis on action is precisely what I contend Spenser struggles with in *The Faerie Queene*. Unlike the character of Christ in the cycle plays or the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, Redcrosse struggles to defeat the obstacles placed before him. It is only through faith that he manages to defeat any foe, even Error. The parallels between Redcrosse's fight with the dragon and Christ's defeat of Satan do show Spenser's familiarity with the various Harrowing narratives discussed in Chapter 2, but this familiarity does not show his blind acceptance of the doctrine or the narratives surrounding it. In the early modern texts that reimagine the Harrowing, the harrowing actions, or the sense of agency derived from depicting a subject's confrontation with demonic powers for his or her own or another's salvation, are what is most compelling.

¹³² Fike published two articles on Spenser and the Harrowing and a monograph. Fike's focus on the heroic aspects of the harrowing and the ways that Spenser's 1590 heroes are completing this journey to and from hell. My study differs from his in that it focuses on the parallel Harrowings of Archimago, Night, and Duessa as a way for Spenser to work out his ambivalence with the doctrine and the agency it implies. Matthew Fike, "Prince Arthur and Christ's Descent into Hell: The Faerie Queene, I. viii and II. viii." *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 12, no. 2 (1999): 6-14. and Matthew Fike, *Spenser's underworld in the 1590 Faerie queene*. (Edwin Mellen Press, 2003).

These confrontations in their myriad forms are dangerously close to depictions of either dark magic—trafficking with devils—or Catholic rituals—knocking on doors, praying to intercessors for salvation, etc. It seems that these associations were not lost on Spenser who multiplies the harrowing to show the dangers of effective magic and its similarity to Catholic ritual. Fike’s assertion that “Classical and Christian paradigms are equally present in Spenser’s imagination” elides the inherent controversy between these paradigms that Spenser plays out in his text. The multiple harrowings highlight this conflict between Classical and Christian. Spenser’s reimagining of the Harrowing confronts the absence of human agency in the Protestant paradigm, and his willingness to use Classical characters to embody these problematic harrowings sets up the allusion to the medieval texts as the signal for theological controversy.

Recently, critics have been interested in Spenser’s use of both Classical and Christian sources, not simply as fodder for the imagination but as philosophical conversants in larger thematic conversations. Kenneth Hodges notes that our scholarly understanding of the Middle Ages colors our ability to see the influence medieval texts had on Renaissance authors:

That the connections between two such well-known knights as Galahad and Redcrosse have not been recognised suggests a blind spot in the field created by period and generic boundaries. There is a difference between asking how Spenser *drew upon* Malory (which several generations of Spenser scholars have asked) and asking how Spenser *responded to* him. The assumption has been too often that medieval works were sufficiently distant from early-modern culture that they

were dependent on early-modern writers or antiquarians for revivification, no longer having political potency of their own.¹³³

Hodges's excellent point demonstrates that we as scholars are quick to show the ways that early modern writers "improve" medieval texts, but we rarely note how these texts are speaking to each other. In the same way that we have assumed that early modern writers found their predecessors to be lacking or unworthy of serious response, we have overestimated the early modern reliance on classical sources for positive emulation. Lars-Håkan Svensson argues that though, "As a figure, Virgil was envisaged as a *vates*—a prophet-like authority endowed with an insight into moral and ethical matters – which made him almost Christian," Spenser's use of Aeneas is more complicated.¹³⁴ Aeneas "appears in contexts that clearly recall Aeneas and Turnus's combat, but behaves in a way that clashes violently with prevalent sixteenth-century notions of Aeneas as a role model but that is consonant with a negative or counterclassical understanding of Aeneas and the ending of the *Aeneid*."¹³⁵ The early modern engagement with medieval texts was not a blanket refusal of their Catholicism any more than the engagement with Classical texts ignored religion in favor of secular themes. Especially when it comes to references to the afterlife from both sources, looking at the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century debates over Christ's descent into hell shows that hell, Limbo, Purgatory, and Hades all

¹³³ Kenneth Hodges, "Making Arthur Protestant: Translating Malory's Grail Quest into Spenser's Book of Holiness." *Review of English Studies* 62, no. 254 (2010): 193-211, 197.

¹³⁴ Lars-Håkan Svensson, "Remembering the Death of Turnus: Spenser's Faerie Queene and the Ending of the Aeneid." *Renaissance Quarterly* 64, no. 2(2011): 430-471, 432-433.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 467.

had controversial meanings and were considered possibly separate resting places for the dead.

In the next section of this chapter, I discuss the historical and theological context of the late sixteenth-century debates over Christ's descent into hell. Looking at the textual evidence from a long-standing conflict between Archbishop John Whitgift, Hebrew scholar Hugh Broughton, and Bishop of Winchester Thomas Bilson, I argue that these tracts show the political side of the debate and the nationalistic aims inherent in defining the Church of England as neither Roman Catholic nor extreme Puritan. In doing so, I demonstrate that moderate clergymen like Bilson implicitly compare Christ's action in the Harrowing to the Witch of Endor just as the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and its descendants characterized Christ as a magician. In the second section, I argue that Spenser responds to this characterization of Christ by presenting Redcrosse's nemesis Archimago as a powerful magician who harrows by proxy. Finally, I examine the most literal Harrowing of Hell in Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene* in which Night and Duessa travel to Hades to show that Spenser depicts human agency over matters of life and death and salvation as theologically problematic in a Protestant paradigm.

Christ's Descent Pamphlets

In Chapter 4, I discuss the Cambridge debates over the descent and the argument between Adam Hill and Alexander Hume. These theologians and academicians focus on philosophical aspects of the harrowing and its relationship to law and social order, and their works are especially relevant to a play about a scholar who negotiates the law. For

Spenser in Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene*, however, the emphasis is on the formation of a national religion and the tumultuous transition between Catholicism and proto-Anglicanism. Though Spenser would also have been familiar with the Cambridge debates and the works of Adam Hill and Alexander Hume, in Book 1, it is clear that he engages with the debate about Christ's literal descent, who or what might be brought back from a harrowing, and the location and purpose of hell as a place. In addition to engaging in the finer points of the debate, Spenser called the character of Christ into question by associating so many of his characters with the action of the descent. As is the case in dramatic and literary texts of the Middle Ages, Spenser's text blurs the distinctions between good harrower and bad harrower. While the theological texts show less anxiety about identity confusion between Christ and Satan, Thomas Bilson's argument implicitly compares Christ's actions in the Harrowing to witchcraft.

Spenser's ambition to become a court poet led him into a world of political intrigue. Though Spenser spent the bulk of his time from 1580 until 1598 in Ireland, major controversies, especially those enacted through print, would have drawn his attention. His focus on religion and religious issues in the 1590 *The Faerie Queene* shows that Spenser was engaged with the shifting tides of the emerging Church of England and its theology. The character of Una, for example, confronts the idea of a female head of the church to replace the male pope, and Redcrosse's journey through the house of holiness is a quasi-pilgrimage that ends not with union with the divine but with a return to action on earth. Because of the emphasis on rooting out recusancy and establishing a strong state religion, often the political machinations of Elizabeth I's court revolved

around religious controversies. Not only were there struggles to deal with Jesuits and Catholics in general, but there were also extreme Protestant separatists to apprehend and punish. The 1580s and 90s were a time when theological disputes could and did become very serious, and while now it is hard to imagine that poets and heads of state would be particularly concerned about one line in a creed or a single of thirty-nine articles of faith, it is equally difficult to imagine that Spenser and his contemporaries in Elizabeth's court would not have registered the tumult surrounding Thomas Bilson, John Whitgift, and Hugh Broughton that came to a head in 1597.¹³⁶

Before I discuss Spenser's multiplications of the harrowing and their theological and dramatic implications, it is important to describe the controversy as it unfolded in Elizabeth's court. Through the 1580s and 90s, Church of England clergymen and scholars agreed that the Church should embrace predestination to some extent, that theological scholarship and scripture should define the faith, and that there needed to be a middle ground between Roman Catholicism and Puritanism or Anabaptism, but the methods for finding this middle ground brought up several disagreements, including one over the third article of faith.¹³⁷ Hugh Broughton, a notable Hebrew scholar, argued vociferously that

¹³⁶ For more information on the late-Elizabethan religious climate and major controversies, see Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), especially pages 279-284 which discuss conflicts between Elizabeth, ministers, and townspeople. See also Peter White, *Predestination, policy and polemic: Conflict and consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War*. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially 96-98 which discuss the increasing doctrinal polarization regarding predestination and Calvinism. Patrick Collinson likens the Puritanism of the late sixteenth-century to shariah law in *The Reformation: A History*. (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 138.

¹³⁷ "Whitgift, John (1530/31?-1604)," William Joseph Sheils in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29311> (accessed February 3, 2014).

Christ did not descend into hell and that this mistaken interpretation comes from a mistranslation of the apostle's creed from the Greek.¹³⁸ Hades, Broughton argued, does not mean Gehenna or hell but the "world of souls." Broughton couched his arguments as a response to John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, and his criticism was personal as well as theological. Though not a writer of descent pamphlets himself, Whitgift is a central figure in the controversy. Perhaps most well-known for his role in the Martin Marprelate controversy, Whitgift was experienced at using what we might now call ghost writers to propagate his message.¹³⁹ The anonymously published "Master Broughtons Letters" will serve to illustrate descent as his response to Broughton's accusations of misunderstanding the Greek and Hebrew texts. Like the Martin Marprelate tracts, the text presents less an argument about the Harrowing than a sustained attack on Broughton's character. Broughton's failure to make peace with the well-connected Archbishop led to his de facto banishment from England, but he continued to participate in theological debates in England through the early seventeenth-century Thomas Bilson, Bishop of Winchester, preached a sermon defending Christ's descent into hell that caused a tremendous uproar.¹⁴⁰ In the years following the sermon, three tracts appeared in quick

¹³⁸ "Broughton, Hugh (1549–1612)," G. Lloyd Jones in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eee ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2013, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3585> (accessed January 10, 2014).

¹³⁹ For more information on Whitgift's involvement in religious controversy see Joseph Black, "The Rhetoric of Reaction: The Martin Marprelate Tracts (1588-1589), Anti-Martinism, and the Uses of Print in Early Modern England." *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 28, no. 3 (1997): 707-725, Benjamin Griffin, "Marring and Mending: Treacherous Likeness in Two Renaissance Controversies." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (1997): 363-380, and Kirsten Poole, "Saints Alive! Falstaff, Martin Marprelate, and the Staging of Puritanism." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (1995): 47-75.

¹⁴⁰ "Bilson, Thomas (1546/7–1616)," William Richardson in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eee ed. Lawrence Goldman, Oxford: Oxford University Press, , <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2401> (accessed January 10, 2014).

succession addressing the issue of the third article of faith. Reading these texts show the preoccupation with discovering where the dead go, why Christ would need to descend to defeat Satan, and the probability and ethics of raising souls from the dead.

The views of Broughton, Bilson, and Whitgift are relevant to Spenser's text especially because they show how these Church of England clergymen saw the descent fitting into their vision of the national church. To be a member of the Church of England one was required to accept the Articles of Faith, and post-1563, the third article stated that Christ descended into hell. Those who were willing to risk the ire of the archbishop and the queen obviously felt strongly that this article and the interpretations thereof were dangerous for the English community as a whole. Those who supported the article felt strongly that Christ's descent was both necessary for Christian salvation and a comfort to believers. Because the formation of the Church of England was both a political and a religious issue in the late sixteenth century, the interpretation of this doctrine that helped to distinguish the Anglican faith from the Catholics and the Puritans, even from Luther and from Calvin, was also both a political and a religious issue. One way that a good Englishmen could perform the necessary subservience to the church and the state was to accept this doctrine, and thus, those who did not accept it and instead argued for its removal from the Apostle's Creed and the Articles of Faith define the contours of acceptable and unacceptable belief and ritual practice in the 1580s and 90s.

The issue of place is of primary importance to the arguments about Christ's descent. Above all else, clergymen and pamphleteers disagreed over where Christ's soul or body went and what the purpose of that place was. If at any point the multiple options

for where bodies and souls went when one died were simple, these debates made it much more complicated. There were heaven and hell, of course, but it seems also that there could be Limbus, not to be confused with Purgatory, Hades, Gehenna, Paradise, Abraham's Bosom, and the list goes on. Like Spenser, Hugh Broughton relies on Classical texts to further his understanding of the afterlife. He uses Greek passages from Homer to show that Hades refers not to a place of torment but to a place where souls stay after death. Many of these terms were different translations of the same words, but the translation used also indicated something about what happened in the afterlife before and after Christ's coming. Those theologians and scholars who did not believe that Christ descended into hell also seemed to believe that the patriarchs and prophets were taken directly to heaven or held in a painless space until the Last Judgment. Many of the staunch supporters of Christ's descent argued that Christ descended into hell for the purposes of preaching to the souls there and defeating Satan because no one could return from hell regardless of the time of their passing. The Jews were associated with the belief that the afterlife was free from torment and generally a space for holding and waiting. Any view that indicated that people could return from hell or that there was a space of torture from which people could escape was associated with the Catholics. The Church of England struggled to find a rudder in these polemical waters, and the theologians who argued forcefully one way or the other, often insisted that the stakes were nothing less than nationalistic.

Broughton criticizes Archbishop Whitgift for relying on a deficient knowledge of Latin in translating and understanding scripture. He goes so far as to threaten the Archbishop in the opening lines of his pamphlet:

Your Graces zeale, how you will burne in this opinion, that Christ descended to Gehenna, & your usage of the Q. [Queen's] aucturity to have your conceit accepted, hath caused exceeding great harme in the Church of England, & is like to cause more unless God give you grace to acknowledge openly how dangerously you were deceived. (A1r)¹⁴¹

Broughton makes it painfully clear that he feels both the Archbishop and the Queen are wrong in their interpretation of the third Article. The stakes of the mistake are no less than hellfire itself. The fact that Broughton does not accept that Christ descended to hell or that the patriarchs went to hell before the coming of Christ does not indicate that he does not believe in hell at all. In fact, he seems to believe that hell is reserved for those who refuse God's covenant and love. Willfully mistranslating the Bible is an act of refusing God's word and love. For Broughton, this misreading has dire consequences for the whole country that will be visited upon the Archbishop specifically:

I commend not our doubtful usage of Hell: but seeing a thing done cannot be undone, I shew that the trap must be looked unto. Your G. [Grace] who say the Q. [Queen] will not have the translation amended; as though the Realme had given her aucturity for Atheisme, your G. must answer, who yourself being entrapped

¹⁴¹ Broughton, Hugh. *An Explication of the Article ... Of Our Lordes Soules Going from His Body to Paradise, Touched by the Greke, General[L?]Y ... The World of Soules, Termed Hel by the Old Saxon, & by All Our Translationes with a Defence of [T]He Q. Of Englandes Religion, to, & against the Archb. Of Canterbury, Who Is Blamed for Turning the Q. Aucturity against Her Owne Faith : Sundry Epistles Are Prefixed [Sic] & Affixed / by H. Br.* Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 1811:03. [S.l. : s.n.], MDXCIX [1599], 1599.

will burne to Entrap others, you must anwere for the continuance of the stumbling block. (F4v)¹⁴²

Because of Whitgift's poor translation skills the entire country is devolving into Atheism and this has nationalistic consequences in this life as well:

Yf the Papistes charge us that the Chiefest preferred scholer in England knowth not one Line of the new Testament, nor one word from what auctority to warrant a translation, we may be thought the most brutish & senseless of any nation under the cope of Heaven. (H2r)¹⁴³

For Broughton then, the consequences begin immediately and are maintained after death.

The Archbishop's woeful language skills will make England the laughing stock of the papist countries and because he has prevented the English people from right understanding of the apostle's creed, he will burn in Gehenna with those who willfully refuse God's presence.

The aforementioned anonymously published pamphlet takes Broughton to task for his brash treatment of the Archbishop and the Queen. The author describes himself as "both a member of that Church, whereof his Grace next under her Majesty, hath chief government, & also an attendant on him, ingaged to him by some favours" (A4r). Though he sprinkles a fair share of Greek and Hebrew throughout his pamphlet, his primary aim is not to confute the logic of Broughton's message but to show the world how prideful and boastful the "Hebrician Braggadoccion Broughton" is (C4v). After noting that Broughton accuses the Archbishop of being poorly educated because he agrees with the

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Church fathers and a great number of other modern theologians by saying that Christ descended into hell, the anonymous author indicates that this is a political and sectarian move on Broughton's point. He writes:

He is very simple who knowes not your meaning, it is a Bishopricke you have expected, and hunted after mainly; and defeated of your hope, as being a very lumpe of intolerable pride, and singular indiscretion, now you would faine currie favour with the Presbyterian faction, though time was, when they angered you, that you could call them ignorant hotlivered fellows of an unseasoned zeale. (D3r)

The pamphleteer calls out Broughton for using the theological debate for political ends and for pandering to sectarian groups within the Church of England. As we can see, the debate over a single line of the creed or the third of thirty-nine articles ends up having very high stakes in the Elizabethan court. Broughton insists that Whitgift (and later Bilson) destroy the integrity of the Church of England and embarrass the country to the rest of the world, and the response to his tract accuses Broughton of threatening the Queen and associating with extreme Protestants for the purpose of revenge.

For Hugh Broughton, the very serious problem of confusion about what happened when Christ died and what happens when believers die stems from not understanding Hebrew and Greek. He writes:

Now 64 times (Hebrew word) coming in the holy tongue, Hell as often in our old translations & never directly for Gehenna, but as by the argument, & so it may be heaven, in speech of the Godly, neither should Hell in the Creed mean anything else but the world to come: the world of Soules. (A3r)¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

Through his explication of various biblical passages, Broughton demonstrates that the word we use to describe hell refers to either the grave or the world of souls. Thomas Bilson refutes Broughton by emphasizing that “place” and “cause” are the essential reasons why the third article is central to the Christian religion. He writes:

Wherefore when the scriptures teach us, that Christ’s soul was in hell; we must not by hell mean Abraham’s bosom, or Paradise, but the very place of the damned, where the souls of sinners are tormented. (Aa4r)¹⁴⁵

The reason Bilson insists that Christ descended into hell and not into another, less odious place is because of his interpretation of the original covenant. Adam’s sin sent all humanity to hell and Christ’s sacrifice redeemed us. Bilson makes it clear that Christ’s descent is central to our salvation and therefore to Christianity as a whole. In order for the “cause” or reason for the descent to relate to the resurrection, the location must be hell—Satan’s abode and a place of torment.

Though Bilson makes it clear in his text that the issues of Christ’s descent and the deliverance of the prophets or patriarchs out of hell must be kept separate in order not to stray into fables, he does discuss the issue at length after establishing the location and purpose of the descent. He writes:

¹⁴⁵ Bilson, Thomas. *The Effect of Certain Sermons Touching the Full Redemption of Mankind by the Death and Blood of Christ Iesus Wherein Besides the Merite of Christs Suffering, the Manner of His Offering, the Power of His Death, the Comfort of His Crosse, the Glorie of His Resurrection, Are Handled, What Paines Christ Suffered in His Soule on the Crosse: Together, with the Place and Purpose of His Descent to Hel after Death: Preached at Paules Crosse and Else Where in London, by the Right Reuerend Father Thomas Bilson Bishop of Winchester. With a Conclusion to the Reader for the Cleering of Certain Obiections Made against Said Doctrine*. Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 279:09. Imprinted at London : By Peter Short for Walter Burre, and are to be sold in Paules Churchyard at the signe of the Flower deluce, 1599., 1599.

The doctrine of Christ's descending into hell to save all his members from coming thither, must not be confounded with this disputation, whether y soules of the prophets and patriarchs were before Christs resurrection in hell or no; but whatsoever we determine or imagine of this later question, the other portion standeth uncontrolled, both by Scriptures and fathers: yet for their sakes, that happily may stumble at this blocke, I will not refraine to speake what I think of this assertion. (Bb3r)

Bilson goes on to list the many church fathers who insist that Christ raised the patriarchs, but he concludes that "as it was altogether unknown to men on earth, and consequently most uncertaine, so is it rather presumptuous to define, then religious to believe" (Cc3v). Bilson here attempts to have it both ways. He obviously does not want to give up on the idea that Christ may have saved the patriarchs, but he does not find it necessary to prove this in order to prove that the descent both occurred and was crucial to man's salvation. At the same time that he warns against belief in fables, he suggests that perhaps the belief that Christ rescued the patriarchs is personally comforting for him.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of Thomas Bilson's 1599 argument in defense of Christ's descent into hell is the section treating the Witch of Endor. In 1 Samuel 28, Saul goes to the Witch of Endor in order to discover how his battle with the Philistines will turn out "when Saul enquired of the Lord, and the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by U'rim, nor by prophets."¹⁴⁶ Bilson discusses this biblical passage in order to debate whether or not souls can return from hell, and he quotes many relevant Church fathers to show that it is most likely that the figure of Samuel that appears to Saul in the

¹⁴⁶ KJV, 1 Samuel 28:6.

witch's hut is a demon disguised as Samuel; however, his discussion implicitly compares Christ's action in the Harrowing to witchcraft:

But if it were the soule of Samuel that appeared, and no illusion of the devil presenting himself in the habit of Samuel, the story in no way convinceth that Samuel was in hell. The witch said, I saw gods ascending out of the earth; but her sight is no good prooffe, where the souls of the just are, or whence they come, the devil might easily delude her and make her believe, he came out of the earth, that came from another place. (Ee1r).

In this case, though Bilson obviously would prefer to believe that the witch's success in bringing back Samuel to talk to Saul is a result of the devil's magic and refuses to accept her sight as proof that the patriarchs are in hell before Christ's coming, the implicit comparison is between the Witch of Endor and Christ. The tentative comparison suggests that the witch may be able to raise a patriarch from the dead to talk with the living but insists that even if the return is possible, it does not prove that the patriarch is in hell. Similarly, Bilson argues that it is clear that Christ can and did descend into hell in order to defeat Satan but that it is not clear that he rescued the patriarchs from hell because they may not have been in hell to begin with. In this way, Bilson's text reverses the order of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* by presenting the necessity and importance of the Harrowing before associating such an action with witchcraft, but it represents for a new generation the association of Christ's action between his death and resurrection and the performance of magic. Most importantly, we see a continued association of Christ's action in raising the dead with witchcraft and a clear example of the anxiety the similarities between the magic of Christ and the magic of the devil or of a witch causes. It is clear that even early

modern theologians waffled in distinguishing between Christ's performance of miracles and a witch's use of demonic powers, and this indicates that the discourses of magic and religion were far less easy to separate and categorize than scholarship has previously believed. Because these discourses were so closely related to be almost indistinguishable, early modern subjects could have seen these harrowing powers as available for effective ritualization.

These tracts that debate whether or not Christ descended into hell provide a relevant background for reading the multiple harrowings in Spenser's text because they show the importance of character and agency in this cultivation of a Church of England theology that is separate from both the Roman Catholic Middle Ages and the extreme Protestantism of the separatists. The controversy over the descent was both political and religious in its late sixteenth-century iteration, and Spenser's participation in the creation of a national epic reimagines the harrowing as alternatively necessary for and an obstacle to the virtue of holiness. By associating the villainous harrowers with both Roman Catholicism and witchcraft, Spenser questions the necessity of maintaining the third article of the faith. In essence, Spenser asks: What does it mean to be an Englishmen who believes in the Harrowing? How does the Harrowing combine medieval and Classical literary predecessors in a way that can either embody the ideal Englishmen or create the perfect villain?

Archimago's Trafficking

The “he” in the title of this chapter: “He that the stubborne sprites can wisely tame,” describes Spenser’s literary manifestation of what at first seems like his vehement anti-Catholicism: Archimago. Like Marlowe’s Mephistopheles discussed further in Chapter 4, Archimago appears as a hermit in friar’s garbs. His appearance deceives Redcrosse and Una, but scholars generally agree that the clothing Archimago wears would have associated him with problematic mendicant orders that would have read profoundly negatively as far back as Chaucer’s “General Prologue,” so the ease with which he takes in our heroic knight and pure lady indicates more about their characters than it does about his.¹⁴⁷ However, Spenser’s ambiguous description of Archimago and the sheer power he displays over the supernatural realm is very compelling. This project as a whole, and this chapter specifically, interrogates the late sixteenth-century amalgamation of religious figure and magician, and its epitome is found in this figure. Archimago appears as a walking remnant of the Catholic past, a possibly nostalgic figure as John Parker would argue, but inarguably the negative representation of that past, especially when coupled with Duessa.¹⁴⁸ And since his books and beads lead not to redemption and forgiveness but to sending spirits into hell to create false images to

¹⁴⁷ For more information about Archimago, see Henry Berger Jr., “Archimago: Between Text and Countertext,” *Studies in English Literature* 43, no. 1 (2003): 212-296, Jennifer Rust, “‘Image of Idolatry’: Iconotropy and the Theo-Political Body in ‘The Faerie Queene.’” *Religion & Literature* 38, no. 3 (2006): 137-155, and A. Bartlett Giamatti, *Play of Double Senses: Spenser’s Faerie Queene* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975). For more information about the friar’s garb, see Laura F. Hodges, “Chaucer’s Friar: ‘Type’ and ‘Semycope’” *The Chaucer Review* 34, no. 3 (2000): 317-343 and Fiona Somerset, “‘Mark Him Wel for He Is on of þo’: Training the ‘Lewed’ Gaze to Discern Hypocrisy” *English Literary History* 68, no. 2 (2001): 315-344.

¹⁴⁸ John Parker, “Faustus, Confession, and the Sins of Omission,” *English Literary History* 80, no. 1 (2013): 29-59. Parker argues that rituals “return as objects of particular nostalgia” in the period (30).

deceive the hero—obvious, hell-worthy, sinful actions—it would seem unlikely that any early modern reader would ever consider magic or trafficking with demons to be an emulable behavior. Yet Archimago has his analog in Book 3’s Merlin, and as many critics have already pointed out, the association of the image-maker’s dark magic and the poet in Book 1 and in Book 3 are ambiguous and possibly self-referential concerns Spenser confronts in his “darke conceit.”¹⁴⁹ The difference between Spenser’s Merlin and his Archimago is in part the replacement of religious remnants with nationalistic sentiment. Merlin is an English hero, a magician who used his powers to unite England. Given the widespread interest in the practice of magic and the practice of ritual that permeates early modern culture, it is clear that ritual’s role needed better definition in the emerging nation state. For this reason, understanding the appeal of practicing magic in a time when it could be horrifically punished logically leads to a search for other magical practitioners who might be considered positive role models for early modern subjects. In the Harrowing of Hell tradition, this role model is obviously Christ.

Thus, though Spenser certainly does not create Archimago in Christ’s image, Spenser’s depiction of Archimago’s powerful magic is a commentary on the ambiguous feelings early modern English subjects harbored for the Catholic ritual tradition and the medieval multi-faceted characterization of Christ. In this chapter, the construction of supernatural agency in villainous characters shows how those characters participate in

¹⁴⁹For more information about the similarities between Archimago and Merlin see Patrick Cheney, ““Secret Powre Unseene””: Good Magic in Spenser’s Legend of Britomart.” *Studies in Philology* 85, no. 1 (1988): 1-28, Genevieve Guenther, “Spenser’s Magic, or Instrumental Aesthetics in the 1590 *Faerie Queene*.” *English Literary Renaissance* 36, no. 2 (2006): 194-226, and A. Bartlett Giamatti, *Play of Double Senses: Spenser’s Faerie Queene* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975).

ritual traditions designed to empower subjects to enact their own salvation rather than depend on invisible acknowledgement of faith.¹⁵⁰ Archimago does not use faith but specific and visible actions to engage with spirits and enact his will on earth.

Archimago's actions reimagine the harrowing by conflating the religious figure and the magician in order to problematize rather than redeem magical action, erasing the sacrificial aspect and sending spirits into hell by proxy to do the magician's will, and using the resurrected sprites as a catalyst for the temptation and trials paradoxically evil and necessary for Redcrosse's redemption. Consciously or unconsciously, Spenser's *Faerie Queene* divulges his anxiety over the effectiveness of ritual and the void the Protestant religion leaves in its refusal to participate therein.

Archimago's association with ritual, especially Catholic ritual, is hardly subtle. When he first appears in the narrative, he is described as praying, knocking his breast, and bidding his beads, but even these initial descriptions paradoxically suggest the usefulness of the old emphasis on physical ritual in comparison to the new emphasis on internal and individual relationships with Christ and the Church. When Redcrosse asks him where he can find enemies to battle, Archimago tells him he should not know:

Ah my deare Sonne (quoth he) how should, alas,
Silly old man, that liues in hidden cell,
Bidding his beades all day for his trespass,

¹⁵⁰ Fortunately, Spenser's engagement with the issue of faith is well-documented in the character of Redcrosse and his fortunate defeat of the dragon in the final cantos. See Hester Lees-Jeffries, "From the Fountain to the Well: Redcrosse Learns to Read" *Studies in Philology* 100, no. 2 (2003): 135-176, Thomas A. Dughi, "Redcrosse's 'Springing Well' of Scriptural Faith" *Studies in English Literature* 37, no. 1 (1997): 21-38, and Richard A. Levin, "The Legende of the Redcrosse Knight and Una, or of the Love of a Good Woman" *Studies in English Literature* 31, no. 1 (1991): 1-24.

Tydings of warre and worldly trouble tell?
With holy father sits not with such things to mell. (I.i.30)

The emphasis is still on the physical aspects of Archimago's "religious" practice with the obvious reference to the rosary and to the forgiveness of sins through penance; however, Archimago in the "hidden cell" has its analogue in canto ten's figure of Contemplation whom Redcrosse finds on a hill:

Here they doe finde that godly aged Sire,
With snowy lockes adowne his shoulders shed,
As hoary frost with spangles doth attire
The mossy braunches of an Oke halfe ded.
Each bone might through his body well be red,
And euery sinew seene through his long fast:
For nought he car'd his carcass long vnfed;
His mind was full of spirituall repast,
And pyn'd his flesh, to keepe his body low and chast. (I.x.48)

Contemplation is contrasted with Archimago because of his *lack* of action. He is so still and does so little that "hoary frost" dresses tree branches more quickly than his hair covers his bones that are protruding from his skin. Contemplation's "mind" is "full of spiritual repast," which is reminiscent of Archimago's focus on "his trespass," but while Archimago can bid his beads to show that he is focused on spiritual matters rather than earthly ones, Contemplation can only perform *inaction* by allowing his body to decompose around him. In both cases, however, the isolation from the outside world troubles the idea of being a Protestant in a physical world with only mental and emotional

defenses against the evils that world manifests.¹⁵¹ The lack of agency ritual supplies is exemplified in Contemplation's transparent and sedentary existence and is parodied in the description of Archimago. The image of Archimago in a cell saying the rosary to no one shows ritual on the invisible inside that cannot be penetrated by the eye. This "hidden ritual," in turn, suggests that contemplation itself may be a show and that magical practice and religious ritual can lurk beneath a surface (in the cell of the mind) that appears to rely on faith alone, for though we can see every bone in Contemplation's body, we cannot see the fullness of his mind.

The concern that this performed contemplation may be a feature of English identity as it is formed through the Church of England is present in Archimago's being both a local and a foreign evil. Hamilton notes that "Archimago replies [to Redcrosse's request] with characteristic equivocation...In effect, he describes the dragon, the intruder who has ravaged Eden, but does so in terms that reduce the Red Cross Knight to a mere chivalric knight."¹⁵² It seems more likely that Archimago pridefully describes himself as the evil rather than the dragon. The clearest evidence that Archimago speaks of himself rather than the dragon is that he refers to this evil as a "man." He is simultaneously "homebred" and a "straunge man," descriptors that show his association with Catholicism as the outside force that permeates and threatens through religious affiliation with Spain,

¹⁵¹ For a reading of Spenser's doubling tendencies and the effect they have on religion, see Jennifer Rust, "'Image of Idolatryes': Iconotropy and the Theo-Political Body in 'The Faerie Queene.'" where she states, "When persons encounter their negative doubles, this tension between object and person is heightened; the divided personages represent two opposing forces that not only cannot mutually annihilate each other, but also appear intrinsically connected" (139).

¹⁵² Hamilton, *The Faerie Queene*, 39, note to Stanza 31.

France, and Italy.¹⁵³ Spenser here engages with a concern for how emerging Anglicanism defines itself against Catholicism. Presenting Archimago as obviously Catholic and also a capable harrower of hell begins to negate the positive harrowing associations present in Redcrosse's defeat of the dragon. If the Harrowing is particularly English as I discussed in Chapter 2, it is also a remnant of a now at least primarily foreign religion to England.

Archimago's statement to Redcrosse about the evil's location may indicate hubris in his own magical and demonic powers more than the dragons. He notes that this evil lives in "wastfull wilderness...by which no liuing wight may euer passe, but thorough great distress" (I.i.32). His own house is described similarly two stanzas later as "downe in a dale, hard by a forests side, far from resort of people, that did pass in traueill to and froe" (I.i.34). The two locales share the wild forest frequently associated with sin and error. That no living man or woman can pass through the territory without great distress is true of Archimago's snare, as Redcrosse and Una are about to discover. They will both be travelling through and travailing over the great distress of Archimago's demonic stunts in the stanzas to come. Redcrosse and Una are not aware of Archimago's evil nature, even though he clearly practices the Catholic faith. He tells them "of Saintes and Popes, and euermore He strowd an *Aue-Mary* after and before" (I.i.35). This clear reference to Catholicism is followed closely by a complex reference to the Classical past of the sort discussed earlier in this chapter.

¹⁵³ For more information about the xenophobic aspects of anti-Catholicism see Frances E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*. Cornell University Press, 1999.

Going from “Saintes and Popes” to “Night” and a “messenger of *Morpheus*,” Spenser brings together the Greek myths, the Catholic tradition, and magic in a way that troubles all three and leaves Protestantism without a clear antecedent or source of supernatural power with which to defend its adherents from physical or mental attack. When everyone is “drownd in deadly sleepe,” associated with spiritual defenselessness in Christian epics, Archimago becomes his evil magician self:

He to his studie goes, and there amiddes
His magick books and artes of sundrie kindes,
He seekes out mighty charmes, to trouble sleepy minds. (I.i.39).

So much of Archimago’s art is based in physical action and reality that it is easy to overlook the very mental and incorporeal nature of his attack on Redcrosse and Una. Unlike the brute force of Errour or the dragon, Archimago’s attack is on the mind, the unseen place (even in Contemplation) where ritual can be performed invisibly and perhaps effect change in the natural or supernatural world. This is another reflection of the anxiety about the internalization inherent in the shift toward Protestantism. The loss of ritual is a loss of visibility and legibility.¹⁵⁴ In order to attack the mind, however, he relies on supernatural forces from the Classical past: he sends for Morpheus, the god of dreams, by way of the first descent into hell in this book. Archimago uses his “charmes and spellles” to call up spirits to do his bidding. His success in calling and commanding spirits has been aptly noted and described by Genevieve Guenther, and while she does

¹⁵⁴ See Claire McEachern, *The poetics of English nationhood, 1590-1612* and Jennifer Rust, “‘Image of Idolatryes’: Iconotropy and the Theo-Political Body in ‘The Faerie Queene.’”

not describe this talent as supernatural agency, it is a form of triumph over the unseen forces. As a result of Archimago's harrowing by proxy, he obtains the obedience of a god: "The God obayde," the poet explains (I.i.44).¹⁵⁵ Thus what happens on the inside is actually the Catholic ritual of Harrowing hell only hidden from view, which suggests that to have this power or agency over the supernatural world is to be demonic.

Further blurring the lines between the Classical tradition and the sinful practice of trafficking with spirits or consorting with demons, Spenser depicts access to Morpheus's power as dependent upon a clear act of apostasy just as Marlowe depicts Faustus's summoning of Mephistopheles, discussed more in Chapter 4, as successful only because he rejects Christ and the scriptures:

Then choosing out few words most horrible,
(Let none them read) thereof did verses frame,
With which and other spelles like terrible,
He bad awake blacke *Plutoes* griesly Dame,
And cursed heuen, and spake reproachful shame
Of highest God, the Lord of life and light,
A bold bad man, that dar'd to call by name
Great *Gorgon*, prince of darknes and dead night,
At which *Cocytus* quakes and *Styx* is put to flight. (I.i.37)

Though it may be argued that sending a spirit to Morpheus is not an act of descending into hell, Spenser makes it very clear that this is an act of witchcraft that involves demonic powers of the highest order. Morpheus's abode may not clearly be in hell, but the ability to have power over Morpheus is so terrible it frightens the denizens of hell

¹⁵⁵ See Genevieve Guenther, "Spenser's Magic, or Instrumental Aesthetics in the 1590 *Faerie Queene*," *English Literary Renaissance* 36, no. 2 (2006): 194-226.

themselves. Archimago's call is not to Satan himself, but to the Classical equivalent: Proserpina. More importantly in the Protestant Christian context, Archimago must speak ill of heaven, God, and Christ, an action that gives him the necessary credibility to be taken seriously as a powerful agent in the underworld.

As in other texts on the Harrowing, the *Faerie Queene* blurs the lines between Christ and Satan, princes of light and darkness. In the same long sentence, Spenser explains that Archimago spoke "reproachful shame" of "the Lord of life and light" and "dar'd to call by name" the "prince of darknes and dead night." In the epic Harrowing episode when these two princes face off, slight slips in pronoun usage (of the type for which both Spenser and Langland are famous) cause conflation between them, blurring the distinctions between righteous sources of supernatural power and evil ones. Thus Archimago's successful harrowing of sprites from Morpheus easily slips into identification with Christ's successful harrowing of the souls of the patriarchs from hell. Though Morpheus himself is not always considered evil, clearly Spenser intends Archimago's actions to be a type of access to or domination over infernal powers. Archimago achieves this feat through ritual harrowing actions that capitalize on the similarity between Catholic ritual and magical practice.

The descent and return from hell in this episode of Spenser's book on holiness is enacted by a spirit rather than a human or a demigod. In this episode, Spenser almost parodies the debates over Christ's descent in that he sets up the elements of Christ's harrowing but twists them in humorous ways. The spirit is described as going down into the earth to find Morpheus:

He making speedy way through spersed ayre,
And through the world of waters wide and deepe,
To *Morpheus* house doth hastily repaire
Amid the bowels of the earth full steepe,
And low, where dawning day doth neuer peepe,
His dwelling is; there *Tethys* his wet bed
Doth euer wash, and *Cynthia* still doth steepe
In siluer deaw his euer-drouping hed,
Whiles sad Night ouer him her mantle black doth spread (I.i.39).

As discussed above, the theologians arguing over Christ's descent often debated whether Christ went to hell in body or in spirit or neither. Spenser seems to come down clearly on the side of spiritual descent in his creation of Archimago's harrowing by proxy, but he complicates this by having another physical descent and return later in the same book. Spenser foreshadows Night and Duessa's trip to hell by mentioning Night's mantle over Morpheus's sleeping body, highlighting a connection between these two parodies of Christ's Harrowing of Hell. Another way he confounds expectations or clear engagement in the debate is in his description of hell. The reader might expect hellfire, but instead Spenser alludes to each of the other four elements: air, water, and earth. The sprite travels through empty air and a world of waters to a place where daylight never comes.

Spenser reverses the actions in hell as well as on the journey there. In the famous episodes from the cycle plays, Christ descends into hell and forcibly breaks down the gates. Spenser's first depiction of hell also contains gates, but these are the dream gates of the *Aeneid* rather than the fortress-like gates of the Catholic hell:

Whose double gates he findeth locked fast,
The one faire fram'd of burnisht Yuory,
The other all with siluer ouercast;

And wakeful dogges before them farre doe lye,
Watching to banish Care their enemy,
Who oft is wont to trouble gentle Sleepe.
By them the Sprite doth passe in quietly,
And vnto *Morpheus* comes, whom drowned deepe
In drowsie fit he finds; of nothing he takes keepe. (I.i.40)

Given the context of these gates, the fact that they are fair and white and silver is less important than the fact that the sprite passes through them without event. Unlike the confrontational battle readers might have expected from a descent into hell, these gates are guarded by dogs unmoved by the sprite. There is no set of raucous and unruly devils defending the exit from hell against those who would spoil it of its contents. Instead, we have a single sprite, perhaps like Christ's single spirit, who slips in unseen to overtake a sleeping leader. Morpheus, the equivalent of Satan in this scene, is already bound by his own laziness and drugged by his own weapon. Rather than the confrontation and either verbal or militaristic defeat expected from a Harrowing episode, Spenser has the sprite attempting to wake Morpheus unsuccessfully in a sort of anti-climax.

When Christ enters hell, he is hailed and questioned. His words, a surprising element of his defeat of Satan, rearrange the cosmic order in such a way as to rob Satan of his "goods," our souls, and render him powerless in the time to come. The sprite Archimago sends into hell is not only required to speak first but his words are not heeded by anyone:

The Messenger approaching to him spake,
But his waste wordes retourned to him in vaine:
So sound he slept, that nought mought him awake.
Then rudely he him thrust, and pusht with paine,

Whereat he gan to stretch: but he againe
Shooke him so hard, that forced him to speake.
As one then in a dreame, whose dryer braine
Is tost with troubled sights and fancies weak,
He mumbled soft, but would not all his silence breake. (I.i.42)

Where Christ's words recreate a spiritual order that enables salvation for the righteous souls who come after him as well as those who lived and died before his birth, the sprite's words return to him without performing any actions. They do not even wake up Morpheus, and he is forced to resort to physical confrontation. This proves equally futile, however, as he "thrusts" and "pushes" without effect. Through the comic episode of the dream attempting to wake the master of dreams unsuccessfully, Spenser inserts a subversion of the idea that Christ's spirit descended into hell to triumph over Satan. The episode seems to ask: What good would a spirit do in hell? How can words triumph over physical states like sleep or death? If conquest in hell requires physical means or intercession, how can Protestantism with its emphasis on faith and passivity possibly protect its adherents from the wiles of those like Archimago? However, Spenser staves off these questions with the sprite's eventual success: "The God obayde." After descending, passing through the gates, defeating the sleep of death, and obtaining the "diuerse dreame," Archimago's sprite returns cheerfully:

He backe returning by the Yuorie dore,
Remounted vp as light as chearfull Larke,
And on his little winges the dreame he bore,
In hast vnto his Lord, where he him left afore. (I.i.44)

Thus even though the episode is comic, it closely follows the Harrowing topos inaugurated by *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, *Piers Plowman*, and the cycle plays in that a character descends into hell, confronts the powers there, and returns with a friend. Archimago is hardly an emulable figure of Christ, but he is linked to the kind of supernatural agency associated with Christ's Harrowing of Hell. Archimago's ritualization of Christ's harrowing actions produces anxiety about wide-spread access to the harrowing rituals because his ability to emulate Christ is not dependent upon his morality and this harrowing is equally if not more successful than other harrowings. Spenser's ambivalence about the tradition of the descent suffuses his depiction of Archimago's actions with comedy, excitement, and uneasiness.

Even the sprite Archimago reforms in the shape of a woman to tempt Redcrosse could remind the reader of the traditional features of the dramatic Harrowing. In *Piers Plowman* and in the cycle plays Christ is described as a trickster who hides his divinity under a cloak of humanity. Gregory of Nazianzus argues that this is like a "baited hook." Spenser parodies this aspect of the Harrowing Christ by having Archimago frame the sprite like a woman and hiding her demonic core to tempt Redcrosse. Her creation implies the deceit for which she is created:

Who all this while with charmes and hidden artes,
Had made a Lady of that other Spright,
And fram'd of liquid ayre her tender partes
So liuely and so like in all mens sight,
That weaker sence it could haue rausht quight:
The maker selfe for all his wondrous witt,
Was nigh beguiled with so goodlly sight:

Her all in white he clad, and ouer it
Cast a black stole, most like to seeme for *Vna* fit. (I.i.45)

Unlike Adam and Eve who were created out of clay, Archimago's Una is created out of liquid air, making her even more insubstantial and changeable than a human female. Her changeability is not a weakness here though but a strength; even her creator, protected by his "wondrous witt" is tempted by her, and all men less focused would be "rauished quight." Her persuasiveness is clearly emphasized, and it is covered by the clothing required for disguise, the clothing Redcrosse's Una wears. This fashioning, which recalls Eden and the original creation, serves a single and definite purpose: it is to trick Redcrosse into sin. When the sprite is placed in the bed with Redcrosse though, her wiles recall Christ's trickery over Satan:

Lo there before his face his Ladie is,
Vnder blacke stole hyding her bayted hooke,
And as halfe blushing offred him to kis,
With gentle blandishment and louely looke,
Most like that virgin true, which for her knight him took (I.i.49)

Though Spenser writes that the sprite is most like Una, a perfect faith would indicate to Redcrosse that he should not trust what his eyes see. Again Archimago's ability to use magical power effectively reverses the roles in the Harrowing without changing the action. Even the black stole, meant to look like Una's, is a reminder of the grave, and the baited hook functions like Christ's hidden divinity under the fleshly cloak that allows him

to pass into the gates of hell without Satan realizing who he is.¹⁵⁶ Perhaps alone the reference to the baited hook might not recall Christ or his descent into hell, but in such close context to a descent and return, it is clear that Spenser twists these thematic associations to draw the theological concept into question.

Overall, Archimago's supernatural agency works to unsettle the binaries created by an oversimplified view of religious change. The parody of the Harrowing and the Creation shows the anxiety over what to do with agency present in this religious tradition in a more contemporary ideology that stresses prayer and contemplation over ritual and visible religious practice. This examination of Archimago's harrowing demonstrates that Spenser cannot be said to argue for or against ritual because ritual itself is more visible and identifiable than contemplation as evidence of adherence to state mandates, but it is also effective in accessing and controlling supernatural realms in a very troubling way. Archimago's character is not just effective in communicating with another world; he also uses elements of that world to deceive people in his own. This sort of agency was troubling to Spenser because it blurred the distinctions between magic and religion that were meant to make the former action damnable and the latter one the cause of salvation. Because the Church of England could not rid itself of all Catholic ritual, choosing which rituals for combatting demonic forces becomes increasingly important. For Spenser, the choice of the Harrowing of Hell is a questionable ritual for the Church of England to

¹⁵⁶ The bait and hook metaphor discussed by multiple medieval theologians is discussed more fully in Chapter 2. See note 101.

retain because it presents so many options for relying on personal agency rather than the will of God.

Night and Duessa Harrow Hell

While critics focus on positive harrowings, such as Redcrosse's harrowing of Una's parents from the dragon or even Arthur's harrowing of Orgoglio's castle to free Redcrosse, the most literal harrowing of the most literal hell that occurs in Book One of *The Faerie Queene* is Night and Duessa's trip to Hades to see Aesculapius and bring Sansjoy back from the dead. This canto, perhaps more than any other in Book One, shows the tremendous anxiety engendered by the loss of ritual in the reformed religion because it directly mirrors Christ's Harrowing of Hell in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* without inserting any of the comic failure that would make it a parody. Night's role as demi-god makes her a liminal figure who crosses boundaries between life and death, earth and Hades. Her understanding of the cosmic order and the relationship between good and evil in the world brings up similar philosophical issues to the Harrowing, and her behavior in hell, coupled with her ability to return from hell, make it impossible to discount her as a harrower. Furthermore, Sansjoy, described as "faithlesse," is healed after being defeated by Redcrosse, and this manifests the fear that faith was not enough or even requisite to save the soul from damnation. Placed next to Redcrosse's defeat of the dragon in canto eleven, Night and Duessa's descent seems rife with human agency over the supernatural world, and Redcrosse's battle is, by comparison, ridiculously passive.

Unlike the hell to which Archimago sends his sprites, the hell of canto five bears all the marks of the Christian hell, which makes its harrowing that much more anxiety producing. As is shown by Bilson and Broughton, it is a place of torture that no one can enter or exit without the help of God. Spenser describes the entrance to hell:

By that same hole an entraunce darke and bace
With smoake and sulphur hiding all the place,
Descends to hell: there creature neuer past,
That backe retourned without heauenly grace;
But dreadfull *Furies*, which their chaines haue brast,
And damned sprights sent forth to make ill men aghast. (I.v.31)

Spenser's description of the entrance to hell depends on the classical text, the *Aeneid*; however, it is also very similar to the descriptions of hell in the cycle play sets.¹⁵⁷ Hell is stereotypically described as hot, smoky, dirty, and loud in English texts.¹⁵⁸ It is populated by furies and the damned. Spenser carefully describes the tortures in hell in order to differentiate the space from the Hades to which Broughton refers in his rebuttal or dismissal of the article. It is not a holding space or a limbus patronum for the righteous patriarchs but an actual hellish landscape of torture. Spenser writes:

And downe to *Plutoes* house are come biliue:
Which passing through, on euery side them stood
The trembling ghosts with sad amazed mood,
Chattring their iron teeth, and staring wide
With stony eies...
Where many soules sit wailing woefully,
And come to fiery flood of *Phlegeton*,

¹⁵⁷ See Peter Meredith, "The Iconography of Hell in the English Cycles: A Practical Perspective." *The Iconography of Hell* (1992): 158-186.

¹⁵⁸ See Thomas Seiler, "Filth and Stench as Aspects of the Iconography of Hell." *The Iconography of Hell* (1992): 132-140.

Whereas the damned ghost in torments fry,
And with sharp shrilling shriekes doe bootless cry,
Cursing high *Ioue*, the which them thither sent.
The house of endlesse paine is built thereby,
In which ten thousand sorts of punishment
The cursed creatures doe eternally torment. (I.v.32-33)

These “exaggerated details” may indicate “a parody of the classical descent to hell,” as Hamilton indicates, but they also differentiate between the possible settings for the Harrowing as brought up in the debates over Christ’s descent. Theologians who deny a literal descent argue that Christ suffered the pains of hell on the cross to pay for mankind’s sin or that the hell referred to in the creed is actually the grave or a holding place for the dead. Those adhering to the figurative or allegorical descent also argue that Christ had no need to rescue souls from hell because only the damned or reprobate go to hell; the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament are elect and already in heaven. Attempting to avoid any resurgence of belief in a Catholic Purgatory, even some supporters of Christ’s descent argue that the descent was about preaching to Satan and the demons to prove superiority rather than rescue anyone at all. Spenser’s only literal depiction of hell in Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene* indicates that this is a literal place full of torment for any soul who enters. This is not the “circumscribing” space Mephistopheles describes as alienation from God and his works in Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*. It is a literal place of punishment that indicates that God’s predestined will is being carried out there and that a harrowing would indicate a subversion of God’s will and the doctrine of predestination.

Night, like Archimago and Satan and Christ, is described as a liminal figure whose power extends over both earth and the supernatural realms of heaven and hell. Though she refers to Jove's power as superior to her own, Spenser tells the reader specifically that she has extensive reach when she subdues Cerberus:

Untill Dayes enemy
Did him appease; then downe his taile he hong
And suffered them to passen quietly:
For she in hell and heauen had power equally (I.v.34).

Like Christ whose power is derived from heaven but manifests both on earth and in hell, Night shows that she can enter or leave hell at will because she is a liminal figure both by definition and as a Christ-figure. Appeasing Cerberus is Night's equivalent to entering the gates that Archimago opens by proxy, and this ability to enter and to leave contradicts Spenser's description of hell as a place that requires "heavenly grace" as an exit ticket. Spenser explains that unlike Hades in classical texts, no one goes into hell and returns in the Christian world. The only "creatures" who can return from hell are those with "heavenly grace" and the furies and demons sent from hell to disturb the salvation of men. A. C. Hamilton notes, "The Sibyl tells Aeneas that those who have returned from hell either have been loved by Jove or have been raised by their own merit. In contrast, heavenly grace alludes to Christ's descent into hell to free the imprisoned souls by his merit not their own."¹⁵⁹ These allusions to the *Aeneid* and the *Gospel of Nicodemus* both emphasize supernatural agency to a degree that has not been taken up in the criticism, for

¹⁵⁹ Hamilton, *The Faerie Queene*, 77, note to Stanza 31.

this is not Redcrosse or Arthur going down to hell to reclaim a lost soul but Night and Duessa.

Night's understanding of the cosmic order and the purpose of the harrowing brings up many of the issues present in the debates about Christ's descent. She reverses the sympathies the audience would expect to feel in the upcoming Harrowing, attempting to fashion herself as a hero combatting Jove's tyranny. She tells Duessa:

But who can turne the streame of destinee,
Or breake the chayne of strong necessitee,
Which fast is tyde to Ioues eternall seat.
The sonnes of Day he fauoreth, I see,
And by my ruines thinks to make them great:
To make one great by others losse, is bad excheat.

Yet shall they not escape so freely all;
For some shall pay the price of others guilt;
And he the man that made *Sansfoy* to fall,
Shall with his owne blood price, that he hath spilt. (I.v.25-26)

Night positions herself in a complex way here. She is both impending harrower and harrowed in that she sees Jove's or God's order as unfairly benefitting "sonnes of Day." Her position in the order of things is the result of being cheated, as Satan was cheated or spoiled of his gains in hell—a position that makes her seem *powerless*, but in return she will be sure to get revenge on God by making Redcrosse pay for the death of Sansfoy, a statement that imbues her character with a sense of agency. Her statement concerning being cheated harkens back to Satan's complaints in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, *Piers Plowman*, and the cycle plays discussed in the previous chapter with the same identity-blurring effect. As the wronged party, her speech leads the audience to feel sympathy for

her as one who is subject to laws that do not always function in one's best interest. Though otherwise her appearance, speech, and actions remind the reader that she is not an emulable character, the reader may easily confuse sympathies for her and for the deceived Redcrosse or Una. The confusion of sympathies can be easily linked to the Harrowing tradition because the beguiler and the beguiled are interchangeable positions for Christ and Satan in the episodes that come out of the Middle Ages. Night references the New Testament law of forgiveness and mercy as though it were the Old Testament law and cosmic order as it existed before the death of Christ, glibly reversing the comfort the New Law should give believers. The "streame of destinee" and the "chayne of strong necessitee" that should refer to the Old Testament law that is overcome by Christ's descent and defeat of Satan is here the charitable law of Christ's mercy described as an obstacle to justice.

Night's first lines in the twenty-sixth stanza highlight the nexus of issues surrounding the interpretation of the Harrowing and the third and seventeenth articles. In explaining that the "sonnes of Day" will not escape from her power, she blatantly negates the work of the crucifixion as it is seen by reformers. All believers, or at least all elect believers—belief being a sign of election, should escape the power of Night and hell through faith alone. But her next lines seem to return the work of the passion and the crucifixion to the service of Satan by positioning sacrifice and "blood price" as the fair payment for the loss of "*Sansfoy*," or those who were without faith. The fact that those born before Christ, regardless of their service to God, are incapable of having faith in him other than through their faith in prophesy is a temporal issue raised by accepting salvation

through faith alone and interpreting the historical Jesus Christ as the only way, truth, and light. The complementary philosophical and theological movement away from works, confession, and penance creates a logical problem for an understanding of justice that requires satisfaction for both parties in a dispute. Spenser highlights these theological issues and the way they are problematically worked out through the Harrowing by depicting Night as vacillating between Christ-like and Satan-like subject positions before she even descends into hell. Thus even within this one Harrowing episode Spenser represents the multiple positions and problems inherent in the debate over Christ's descent into hell. The multiplicity indicates Spenser's concern with the Elizabethan emphasis on the Harrowing in the Articles of Faith.

Spenser further emphasizes the concerns about the laws as they have been set down by God and enacted through Satan and Christ by depicting Aesculapius himself as a sympathetic character, brought to hell before his death, damned for all eternity for a single, restorative and not even destructive, action, and apparently regretful for his transgression. He tells Night,

Thou temptest me in vaine,
To dare the thing, which daily yet I rew,
And the old cause of my continued pained
With like attempt to like end to renew.
Is not enough, that thrust from heauen dew
Here endlesse penance for one fault I pay,
But that redoubled crime with vengeance new
Thou biddest me to eeke? (I.v.42)

Aesculapius's lament here points to the issues of mercy that form the underlying motive for the Harrowing. His punishment hardly seems to fit the crime in that he saved one person from death and suffers an eternity for it. Moreover his life and his fault occur before the coming of Christ, which makes him an ideal candidate for sympathy, especially in the context of the Harrowing where Christ descends specifically for the purpose of redeeming the souls who died before his incarnation. His remorse for his sin is evident in his description of the act as a "thing, which daily yet [he] rews." His sorrow at being in hell is appropriately linked to being "thrust from heauen dew" and not simply a cause of his perpetual pain.

Despite the fact that Aesculapius commits the same "crime" Pilate and the Jews try Jesus for in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, Spenser is careful to associate his actions with science rather than with magic, further distancing him from Archimago, Duessa, and Night. By emphasizing Aesculapius's association with science rather than magic, Spenser differentiates between the damnable and illegal act of magic and the practice of medicine in a way that might make the modern reader find his ideas prescient, but that actually shows the interdependence of the emerging scientific discourse with magic and religion:

Such wondrous science in mans witt to rain
When Ioue auizd, that could the dead reuiue,
And fates expired could renew again,
Of endlesse life he might him not depriue,
But vnto hell did thrust him downe aliue,
With flashing thunderbolt ywounded sore:
Where long remaining, he did always striue
Him selfe with salues to health for to restore,
And slake the heauenly fire, that raged euermore. (I.v.40)

Spenser describes Aesculapius's healing as "wondrous" and derived from "mans witt," but in doing so, he characterizes Jove as the petulant god unwilling to have his order subverted. Though Hamilton insists that we are not meant to read Aesculapius as a sympathetic character in this scene, and that quite obviously, Spenser puts him in hell rightly, the narrative depicts him as a sort of epic hero, endlessly striving against his condition.¹⁶⁰ There is a differentiation between Aesculapius's striving against the gods and Archimago and Duessa's striving against Una and Redcrosse, but both science and magic are referred to as particularly human agencies that intervene in the cosmic order in possibly dangerous ways. In the context of the larger scene, a sort of negative version of the Harrowing, the fact that both magic and science are effective and dangerous leads to the conclusion that Spenser is insisting that science, like magic, meddles in the affairs of the Almighty who has to protect the all-good version of the world he has created. In this classical allusion, Spenser embeds another reference to the problematic human agency of medicine and science. Aesculapius's ability to intervene in natural philosophy and perform "unnatural" feats is an additional threat to the idea of a contemplative and passive Protestantism that relies on faith rather than ritual. Trevor notes, "For it is not merely that Aesculapius treats physical suffering and loss of life but that to do so in *The Faerie Queene* means to invoke hellish powers that defy the Gods and reanimate that which would be better off left dead."¹⁶¹ The added context of the Harrowing of Hell, however, indicates that the reference to returning people from hell would be far more

¹⁶⁰ Hamilton, *The Faerie Queene*, 78, note to Stanza 36.

¹⁶¹ Trevor, "Sadness in The Faerie Queene," 248.

complex. The science that Aesculapius performs is not significantly different than what Christ does for Lazarus, and what Night does for Sansjoy, Christ is willing to do for Adam and the patriarchs. Spenser seems to alleviate the apprehension that magic is not sufficiently different from either religion and science by representing the cosmic order as a clear geographical hierarchy—hell is at the bottom, earth above, and heaven above earth—but rather than make hard boundaries that delineate who belongs where, both good and bad characters travel easily between them.

Night's action within hell is similar to Christ's in that she uses her rhetorical skill to convince a damned soul to help her return the faithless Sansjoy to the health. Hamilton, Nohnberg, and Røstvig argue that Aesculapius cannot be considered a Christ-figure or even eligible for Harrowing because he heals the body and not the spirit; however, it is Night and not Aesculapius that is enacting the Harrowing in this scene.¹⁶² If perhaps not purposeful, Spenser's use of the word "alight" to describe Night's arrival at Aesculapius's side is ironic in that in the Harrowing scenes from the Middle Ages, Christ arrives as a bright light. More specifically, her behavior in hell mirrors that of Christ in that she convinces Aesculapius with her words to perform the actions she requires:

Beseeching him with prayer, and with praise,
If either salues, or oyles, or herbes, or charmes
A fardonne wight from dore of death mote raise,
He would at her request prolong her nephews daies. (I.v.41)

¹⁶² Hamilton, *The Faerie Queene*, 78, note to Stanza 36. Also see Hamilton, A. C. *The Structure of Allegory in 'The Faerie Queene'* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1961), James Nohnberg, *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), and Maren-Sofie Rostvig *Configurations: A Topomorphical Approach to Renaissance Poetry* (Scandinavian University Press, 1994).

The syntax in this passage is complex, but essentially Night beseeches Aesculapius to use whatever means necessary to give her nephew another chance at life. As the Harrower, she is negotiating with a third party rather than actually healing Sansjoy herself. She also highlights here the kinship between herself and the (possible) denizen of hell as Christ does with Adam and the other patriarchs in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and the cycle plays when he descends into hell. As a side note, Night also re-blurs the lines Spenser as poet/narrator draws when he associates Aesculapius's work with science and not magic by referring to "salves" and "charmes" as equally potent and beneficial in this case. This sort of natural philosophy would have been ambiguously read throughout the Renaissance because medicine was not fully professionalized nor was the discourse of science fully differentiated from magic.

Though Aesculapius actually refuses to help Night at first, the poet/narrator records that Night returns to the world:

Her words preuaild: And then the learned leach
 His cunning hand gan to his wounds to lay,
 And all things els, the which his art did teach:
 Which hauing scene, from thence arose away
 The mother of dredd darkenesse, and let stay
Aueugles sonne there in the leaches cure,
 And backe retourning tooke her wonted way,
 To ronne her timely race, whilst *Phoebus* pure
 In westerne waues his weary wagon did recure (I.v.44)

Again, Spenser's words refuse clarity in their dual possibilities. In this final stanza of the canto, we learn that Night's "words preuaild," and that like Christ, she descends into the underworld and uses her verbal abilities to convince someone there to do her bidding. We

also see that she “arose away” and “backe retourning took her wonted way,” actions that are also reserved for Christ in the Harrowing. We are never sure of the eventual fate of Sansjoy, however. Everything that we have learned about Aesculapius indicates that there is no reason why Sansjoy would not expect a return to full health, and though Hamilton indicates in the note that “The further fortunes of Sansjoy need not be told: none return from hell ‘without heauenly grace,’” Night’s return to earth in this same stanza seriously complicates that reading. What it does seem safe to say is that Spenser leaves the possibility open for a reason. He deliberately denies any closure on the idea of a harrowing. Though he recognizes the analog as empowering and theatrically appealing, Spenser refuses to weigh in definitively on the debate about Christ’s descent and its centrality or inconsequentiality to our redemption. Instead he complicates the debate by multiplying the number of subjects who might be capable of such a descent, calling the abilities to descend, negotiate with the damned, and return to earth into moral question.

Spenser’s ambivalence about Christ’s descent made clear through his troubling reimaginings of descents and returns through Book 1 of his *Faerie Queene* provides a great deal of information about the transition of the Harrowing of Hell from the Catholic medieval period to the Protestant early modern period. The similarities between Christ’s Harrowing and Classical descents into hell heightened the anxiety about the source material for the line in the Apostle’s Creed and thereby the anxiety about the source of the power to intervene in one’s own fate (or on behalf of a friend) in the afterlife. The idea that the early church simply lifted a popular narrative from antiquity like the *Aeneid* and replaced the main character was unsettling for Spenser at the same time that the

notion of a powerful Christ Knight who could battle on behalf of his followers was appealing. Even more disturbing was the idea that *any* character could step off the page and access the power to intervene in God's plan and the natural order of the world. For Spenser, and perhaps for many of the men and women attempting to embrace the doctrinal changes of the newly Protestant orthodoxy, the emphasis on contemplation without an image and predestination without explanation conscribed the circle of light that was his understanding of the world to such a degree that the shadowy realm of God's unknowable will became an nebulous threat to his agency over his own spiritual fate. Archimago's and Night's successful harrowings of the underworld serve as the dark side of Redcrosse's and Arthur's amorphous harrowings on the earthly plane. If Luther encouraged focusing on the image, the comforting story of the narrative, in order to apprehend and accept the importance of Christ's descent, then Spenser and the early English Protestants flatly refused, insisting that the image and the narrative kept morphing beneath their gaze, offering indefinite heroes and frightening patrons and spoils in the journeys and returns from the underworld.

Spenser's text provides us with a kind of anti-Harrowing model; Book 1 gives us the narratives of two successful harrowers whose character cannot be easily likened to Christ. Archimago's and Night's motivations are less altruistic and their harrowing actions often read as parodies of Christ's descent rather than as sincere appropriations of his power. In the next chapter, we turn our attention to Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and its titular character. Like Archimago, Faustus is often read as always already

damned, but unlike Archimago, Faustus's motivations are not malicious and can even be read as altruistic. After offering his soul in a contract with Lucifer, Faustus uses juridical rhetoric to continually jeopardize Lucifer's spoils, renegotiating the contract and calling on Christ in order to threaten Mephistopheles and Lucifer and show his power over them. Faustus's ritualization of Christ's debate with Satan in hell demonstrates that Marlowe was much less anxious than Spenser about human agency and its role in the salvation of mankind.

CHAPTER IV

“IMPOSE SOME END TO MY INCESSANT PAIN”:

FAUSTUS RENEGOTIATES DAMNATION

GLENDOWER

Why, I can teach you, cousin, to command the devil.

HOTSPUR

And I can teach thee, coz, to shame the devil
By telling truth. Tell truth and shame the devil.
If thou have power to raise him, bring him hither,
And I'll be sworn I have power to shame him hence.
O, while you live, tell truth and shame the devil!¹⁶³

—William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part I*

William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I* (1597) stages an argument between the Welsh military leader and magician, Glendower, and Prince Hal's arch-rival, Henry Hotspur in which Glendower claims he can summon the devil and Hotspur sarcastically replies that the right way to deal with the devil is to shame him by telling the truth. Despite their differences, the characters seem to agree on some aspects of encountering the devil. The rituals necessary to treat with the devil can be taught; they can be modeled, copied, learned. The repetition of “teach” between the two characters emphasizes this obtainable and transferable nature of demonic ritual. Furthermore, involving oneself with the devil involves a power gain of some significance. Glendower insists that this power is to “command,” a word that implies that the magician's will supersedes the demonic one

¹⁶³ William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part I*, Eds. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994, III.i.59-65.

in the interaction. No matter how wrong or evil the devil's intent when he arrives, Glendower believes he can shape that intent into action in his own best interests, or in this case, in the interests of the Welsh army. Contrarily, Hotspur claims the power to "shame," countering Glendower's professed ability to harness demonic powers with his own ability to contain and negate them. It may be productive to associate Glendower's recommended actions with witchcraft and Hotspur's with exorcism; early modern encounters with the devil are often described as either witchcraft pacts or religious exorcisms, at least in the criticism written about them.¹⁶⁴ In the case of witchcraft, the devil is summoned to aid a person with his or her own goals, and in the case of exorcism, a devil is banished by the forces of good. But setting these positions up as binaries does not do justice to either character; in fact, it erases his or her agency by associating each of them with particular groups because both witchcraft and exorcism are defining categories. In one case, the devil is usually thought of as having the upper hand; in the other case, the priest is generally the more powerful agent, but in both instances the subject positions define the subject's ability to deal with the devil. A witch is a witch precisely because she makes a pact with the devil, and a priest is a priest, at least in part, because he has the power to perform exorcisms. If it is possible that Shakespeare straightforwardly presents Glendower as a witch, it is definitely not the case that Hotspur

¹⁶⁴ For more information about witchcraft and exorcism see James Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England*. (Edinburgh Gate: Longman/Pearson, 2001) and Marion Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft: Stories of Early English Witches*. (New York: Routledge, 1999). Sharpe and Gibson associate witchcraft and exorcism. Gibson even argues that the two were so similar that the exorcism pamphlet incorporated and replaced the witchcraft pamphlet of the seventeenth century, "It is as if possession invaded the limited space devoted in pamphlets to discussing witchcraft and the supernatural, merged with the witchcraft pamphlet and, making its subject controversial, temporarily destroyed it" (188).

is being presented as a priest. Instead, it seems that Hotspur's way of relating to the devil "while you live" presents a third, underexplored option in our understanding of early modern demonology. As the close reading of this short bit of text implies, this third option opens up the methods by which subjects can have power over the devil, assumes that subjects coming from vastly different backgrounds (witches and priests) might have something to say to one another about dealing with the devil, and that, rather than being a constitutive feature of identity formation, dealing with the devil could and *should* be taught to a wide variety of people.

The medieval tradition of the Harrowing of Hell can supply a model for understanding this third, underexplored option in reading early modern encounters with the devil: that of Christ as he descends and defeats Satan in order to claim ownership of mankind's souls. Comparing early modern characters who summon and converse with the devil to Christ may seem not only counterintuitive but even preposterous. Christ would not negotiate with the devil, a critic might say; he would not use magic or trickery to gain the upper-hand in a struggle between right and wrong. As we have seen in the readings of the literary texts in Chapter 2 and in the discussion of Thomas Bilson's theological argument in Chapter 3, however, there was a version of Christ that was easily associated with the magician and who dealt with the devil in direct confrontation that only seems counterintuitive because he is no longer current. This model is an important one to recognize and apply because it makes previously illegible actions of characters like Hotspur legible and helps us to recreate a more accurate understanding of the early modern mindset concerning magic and interactions with the supernatural. The Harrowing

shows that there were not two poles—damnation or salvation—or two options—witchcraft or exorcism—for dealing with the devil but many more possible avenues for overcoming the power of evil in one’s life. The Harrowing model requires identification with Christ as he appears in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, *Piers Plowman*, and the cycle plays. The Character of Christ has identifiable features and commits repeatable acts that can be emulated to show a type or figure. He uses juridical rhetoric to renegotiate the covenant implied by the Fall, confronts and punishes unjust or tyrannical figures, and uses magic and trickery to restore justice and mercy. In this chapter, I explore the first action—that of using juridical rhetoric to renegotiate salvation—in the actions of Christ and Christopher Marlowe’s Faustus in the A-Text of *Doctor Faustus*.¹⁶⁵ Hotspur and Faustus both rely on Christ’s ability to verbally negotiate the law in order to harrow hell, but further commentary on their characters and the necessity of seeing them as Christ figures is necessary to understand why early modern subjects required a model for dealing with demons other than the models of the witch and the priest.

Glendower and Hotspur can again represent the variety of subjects who might need to know how to deal with demons. Neither character is particularly sympathetic in the scene: Glendower is represented as a foolish overachiever who does not realize his pagan magic has been displaced, and Hotspur is alienating one of his only allies in his

¹⁶⁵ Leah Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton*. (London: Routledge, 1996): 51. Angus Fletcher, “*Doctor Faustus* and the Lutheran Aesthetic.” *English Literary Renaissance* (2005): 187-209. Despite Angus Fletcher’s claim that “the tragic mood is not diminished by the increased comedy of the B-text,” (188, n. 4) I here follow Leah Marcus who notes that “Even though the spirituality of A appears more strenuous and psychologically demanding throughout, the fate of Faustus is less unequivocally established in that version than in B” (51). The idea that Faustus harrows Lucifer by continually reclaiming his soul and the rights to it through the play requires an indeterminate ending.

rebellion against Henry IV. If the mere mention of the devil is enough to damn them, the fact that these characters are unsympathetic is not surprising. As James Sharpe indicates, a witch is “a figure who inspired fear and loathing of the deepest nature.”¹⁶⁶ Perhaps there is a hint here that Hotspur loathes Glendower, but he certainly does not seem to fear him. A distinction must be made between an ideal character and a villain who inspires loathing. Hotspur and Glendower are not villains in the way that the characters of Archimago and Night were clearly villainous in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* discussed in Chapter 3. Their motivations for using magic, for requiring access to supernatural power, are vastly different, and the acts used to obtain that power must be read differently as well. Marlowe’s Faustus is another character who has been consistently read as entirely unsympathetic, but who cannot rightly be called a villain. It has become common to argue about which theological positions Marlowe held that damned Faustus rather than to ask whether or not he is damned.¹⁶⁷ Such theologically specific readings keep the audience from being able to identify with Faustus at all, and the distance between the audience and characters who use magic or converse with the devil hinders our ability to construct a reasonable picture of how early modern subjects might have seen or

¹⁶⁶ Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England*, 44.

¹⁶⁷ See Myka Tucker-Abramson, “Is Marlowe a Marxist? The Economic Reformation of Magic in Doctor Faustus,” *Rethinking Marxism* 24, no. 2 (2012): 288-301, Angus Fletcher’s “*Doctor Faustus* and the Lutheran Aesthetic,” and Adrian Streete’s “Calvinist Conceptions of Hell in Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*” *Notes and Queries* (2000): 430-432. These scholars argue, based on Marlowe’s time in divinity at Cambridge, that Martin Luther and John Calvin’s texts greatly influence the theology of the play. This is a position with which I agree; however, I am less concerned with Marlowe’s theological leanings than with the way that he exploits the philosophical problems that a holistic acceptance of either Lutheranism or Calvinism creates.

interacted with these characters. David Bevington elegantly points out these issues in his introduction to the play:

The central problem with most orthodox interpretations of *Doctor Faustus* is that they often verge on lack of sympathy, even open hostility. To the extent that Faustus is a negative object lesson, we are distanced from him. The result is, for the purposes of tragedy, a diminished protagonist and a conventional 'message' that can sound reductively homiletic.¹⁶⁸

The question of suspense and sympathy are related in that they create audience involvement in the narrative of the play. Any reading of *Doctor Faustus*, orthodox, heterodox or unrelated to doctrinal views, that does not allow for any sympathy or identification with Faustus will keep the audience from feeling any suspense concerning the outcome. Bevington's introduction attempts to resolve "the perennial debate between orthodox and heterodox readings" by linking Marlowe's preoccupations with his art with the Renaissance controversies over the practice of magic. The Harrowing of Hell, as a tradition that depicts Christ as a magical practitioner who debates with Satan, provides an excellent opportunity to examine how interrelated rather than at odds these viewpoints may have been. Critics may not want to view Faustus as an emulable character because of the dominant narratives about witchcraft in the period. Reading Faustus as a positive character, however, makes the reading of Marlowe's play an emotional investment that can even be considered suspenseful.

How, then, does a play about a magician's fall from grace contain any suspense or possible investments for the audience? *Doctor Faustus* maintains suspense by continually

¹⁶⁸ David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen, eds. *Doctor Faustus*. (Manchester University Press, 1993), 21.

returning to the possibility of defeating Satan, leaving hell, being resurrected with Christ, or saving oneself by behaving like Christ. The practice of magic as a site for positive agency and the theological positions concerning hell come together in the Renaissance reimaginings of the Harrowing precisely because the shift from Catholicism to Protestantism discussed in detail in the first chapter provided such a strong motivation for seeking supernatural agency. The Protestant emphasis on predestination left individuals with very few if any actions to perform in defense of their own soul. In the context of this power vacuum, Faustus's actions become clear rebuttals to predestination logic. Faustus sets up and proves that his soul is his own by using it as a bargaining tool throughout the play. Arguing that "*Doctor Faustus* explores or exposes the instability of Protestant or Puritan 'manliness,'" Ian McAdam insists, "psychologically it has been recognized that this radical Protestant internalization of faith placed an almost unbearable burden of responsibility on the believer."¹⁶⁹ Marlowe, through Faustus, responds to that burden of responsibility by insisting that subjects can participate in and effect their own salvation by accepting and confronting the supernatural entities who have interest in that salvation. Faustus's invocation of Mephistopheles and his responses to their interactions repeatedly highlight the agency of the subject through the focus on rhetorical participation in the law.

In the late sixteenth century, Church of England clergymen, Scottish schoolmasters, poets, and writers engaged in heated, published debates about the article

¹⁶⁹ Ian McAdam, *Magic and Masculinity in Early Modern English Drama* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2009), 57.

of faith or the line of the Apostle's Creed that refers to the Harrowing. The Forty-two Articles written by Thomas Cranmer in 1552 left out the article "He descended into hell," but in 1563, the descent became the third of the Thirty-Nine Articles and provided the necessary inducement for reopening dialogue concerning Christ's descent into hell. Of particular interest in understanding the literature of Christopher Marlowe are the works of Christopher Carlile, Adam Hill, and Alexander Hume. Carlile's argument against a literal understanding of the descent was delivered at Cambridge against the work of John Cheke in 1552, the year of Edmund Spenser's birth and a dozen years before the births of Marlowe and Shakespeare.¹⁷⁰ Perhaps the removal of the article and then its subsequent reinstatement gave a variety of theologians the impression that they could influence Church of England policy directly. Though Marlowe was not in Cambridge until the 1580s, as G.M. Pinciss points out, "Cambridge in the later 1580s was the battlefield on which the Calvinist and anti-Calvinist advocates played out their strategies, and the young Marlowe was surely an impressionable witness."¹⁷¹ A version of Carlile's argument was published in 1582 with a dedication to the Earl of Huntington. The debate continued in the works of Adam Hill and Alexander Hume, whose long and detailed explications of scriptural references to the descent were published in 1592 and 1594.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Stephen Wright, "Carlile, Christopher (*d.* in or before 1588)." Stephen Wright In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., edited by Lawrence Goldman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4682> (accessed September 13, 2013).

¹⁷¹ G. M. Pinciss, "Marlowe's Cambridge Years and the Writing of Doctor Faustus." *Studies in English Literature* 33.2 (1993): 249-264.

¹⁷² S. M. Dunnigan, "Hume, Alexander (*c.* 1557–1609)." S. M. Dunnigan In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Online ed., edited by Lawrence Goldman, May 2013. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14133> (accessed September 13, 2013). and Summerson, Henry. "Hill, Adam (*c.* 1548–1595)." Henry Summerson In *Oxford*

Heather Anne Hirschfeld argues that these texts provide a valuable context for reading *Doctor Faustus* because they share the “preoccupation with what was *enough* for Christ to do to redeem an infinite number of Christian souls.”¹⁷³ She traces the Protestant description of a hell “where Christ’s sufficiency is obsessively calculated and measured” and where Faustus finds himself and Christ’s mercy wanting.¹⁷⁴ The issue of sufficiency is undoubtedly present in the debates about the descent and in Marlowe’s play, but the debates also explore other interesting issues that come up in the literature. Some of these include the reciprocal relationship between religious discourse and the law or legalese in constructing an epistemology of order and power dynamics and the subject’s agency in choosing good or evil and resisting temptation and participating in one’s own salvation. In *Doctor Faustus*, Christopher Marlowe reinterprets the Harrowing of Hell to show the problems with agency resulting from placing predestination at the center of the new Protestant Christian repentance. He emphasizes the importance of words and rhetoric to show that the only way to function in the world, whether mundane or supernatural, is to act, rhetorically or physically.

Hirschfeld’s understanding of the debates brings up interesting points about agency. She writes, “The debate about the descent to hell...transposes the human problem of satisfaction to Christ. Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* does something similar: it begins with an explicitly discontent protagonist seeking fulfillment, and it ends by

Dictionary of National Biography, online ed., edited by Lawrence Goldman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, . <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13266> (accessed September 13, 2013).

¹⁷³ Heather Anne Hirschfeld, ““The Verie Paines of Hell’: *Doctor Faustus* and the Controversy over Christ’s Descent.” *Shakespeare Studies* 36 (2008): 166-81, 166.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 179.

showing that protagonist's frightened glimpse of the uncertain work of the Crucifixion."¹⁷⁵ Here she suggests that Renaissance subjects saw themselves as agents in their own salvation, but that the Harrowing displaces that agency on Christ. First, I want to make explicit something Hirschfield implies in her argument: Faustus is a figure of Christ, albeit an unusual one. Even though Faustus as a figure of Christ seems counterintuitive given the fact that he makes deals with the devil and practices magic, these are actions associated with Christ in the tradition of the Harrowing of Hell. However, rather than moving the responsibility for salvation onto Christ and relieving the believer, Marlowe's Faustus absorbs the agency of Christ in the Harrowing and models his own confrontation with Satan on Christ's. Understanding the relationship between Marlowe's play and the debates about the descent as direct rather than simply suggestive enables us to see how Faustus is a reinterpretation of Christ that models the agency available to subjects through rhetoric under law. The criticism that debates whether Marlowe's doctrinal leanings are particularly Lutheran or Calvinist or Catholic fails to see Marlowe's concern with the original contracts and covenants as they are presented in the central Christian mythos. In *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe shows a protagonist unwilling to be passively led to victory over evil. Faustus must act in the face of uncertain redemption.

One of the most important sites for agency in the Renaissance was the use of rhetoric. Stuart Clark refers to rhetoric as "one of the major sources of mental

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 181.

conditioning in early modern culture.”¹⁷⁶ Debate and litigation become sites for the resolution of conflict in a prominent way in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Hugh Broughton’s insistence that he be able to resolve the conflict over the translation of the word “sheol,” discussed in Chapter 3, through debate with Church of England theologians is a case in point. Many of these rhetorical victories were not in the form of debate, however, but in the form of juridical dispute. Recent scholarship on early modern literature posits an interrelationship between the stage and the court system in early modern England that bears upon the construction of the early modern subject and his or her relation to the state. Erica Sheen and Lorna Hutson note the interrelationship of the “cultural spaces of both legal and literary writing,” but they more specifically point out that “the languages and procedural structures of the common law...find their way into literary representations of subjectivity and agency in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.”¹⁷⁷ The law’s construction of the subject influences the construction of character on the stage and provides playwrights a vocabulary for representing the self and the subject’s possibility for action. Even more positively, A. G. Harmon argues that, in the early modern period, the law contributes to “the dignity of persons and things that comes with sheer, simple integrity.”¹⁷⁸ This is, perhaps, an overly aspirational description of the law’s construction of the subject, but the idea that law creates the subject with rights and constrains the subject through its rights is important to understanding how the

¹⁷⁶ Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 65.

¹⁷⁷ Erica Sheen and Lorna Hutson, Eds. *Literature, Politics and Law in Renaissance England*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 3.

¹⁷⁸ A. G. Harmon, *Eternal Bonds, True Contracts: Law and Nature in Shakespeare’s Problem Plays*. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 1-2.

law is represented in the plays of the period and how those plays in turn might have contributed to the audience's understanding of the law. Because of their close proximity and their similar concerns in representing or re-representing human action, the theater and the court influenced one another by constructing the early modern subject as both subject to and empowered by the law. Marlowe's conception of the law in *Doctor Faustus* indicates not only its dualistic objectifying and authorizing nature, but also its thoroughly embedded status within the larger conception of Renaissance knowledge. *Doctor Faustus* shows how both the school-room, debate-style rhetoric exemplified by the descent debates and the juridical rhetoric of the courts and property rights influenced Marlowe's representation of words as supernatural agency.

The currency of an active and rhetorically powerful Christ is evident in the image that circulated with Hill's *Defence of the Article: Christ Descended into Hell* (1592). This picture showed a victorious Christ stepping out of a coffin onto a dragon and skeleton. Christ holds his left hand up in a gesture of offering and holds a gigantic quill in his right hand.



Figure 1

Title Page of Adam Hill's *Defence of the Article* (1592)¹⁷⁹

By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library

¹⁷⁹ Title page of Adam Hill's *The Defence of the Article: Christ Descended into Hell Vvith Arguments Obiected against the Truth of the Same Doctrine: Of One Alexander Humes. All Which Reasons Are Confuted, and the Same Doctrine Cleerely Defended. By Adam Hyll, D. Of Diuinity. Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 345:12. edited by Alexander schoolmaster Hume: At London : Printed [by John Windet] for William Ponsonbie, 1592., 1592.*

This picture shows the dual defeat of Satan and Death enacted by the descent, actions Hill, Thomas Bilson, and other Tudor theologians argued were necessary for complete salvation. Interestingly, the quill in Christ's right hand departs from the standard he carried in most *Gospel of Nicodemus* illustrations (see the image in the introduction), but the change is not inappropriate or without textual basis. Though the apocryphal gospel, the cycle plays, and even *Piers Plowman* depict Christ's action as military or physical defeat in addition to verbal debate, Hill and his contemporaries saw the defeat as primarily rhetorical rather than physical. The quill then becomes a symbol for the words it potentially produces in the same way that a sword becomes a symbol for the military might of its bearer. In this emphasis on rhetoric, Adam Hill typifies a shift in thinking over the course of the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance. As it becomes arguably more important for an aristocratic man to be educated and speak well than to be strong and fight well, Hill and other Renaissance theologians begin to fashion Christ not as a knight but as a writer and a nationalistic thinker. This indicates a switch from the focus on militaristic conquest towards a focus on rhetoric.

Christ is standing on both a dragon and a skeleton representing his defeat of both Satan and Death. This image exemplifies the ways that moderate Protestant theologians steered the Harrowing narrative toward a national narrative in order to counter Puritan objections and associations of the descent with Catholicism. The dragon, on the other hand, has little textual basis in the theological debates since Hill's argument does not figure Satan as a dragon; instead, including Christ standing over a dragon in the 1592 text visually associates him with the patron saint of England, Saint George (discussed in the

previous chapter), and his female dragon-defeating counterpart, Saint Margaret (discussed in the next chapter). Hill and his printer obviously felt that the image of Christ would be even more persuasive if he was linked with these spiritual and patriotic figures. This change, I argue, was meant to associate the Harrowing Christ with England in order to use emerging nationalism to argue for the acceptance of a controversial theological position. The images accompanying hagiographies often served to associate saints with Christ, essentially promoting human saints to the position of spiritual agents. Alison Chapman suggests that these hagiographies were still relevant to early modern culture after the split with the Catholic Church, arguing that “men and women retained a very high level of what we might call hagiographic literacy.”¹⁸⁰ Chapman also notes a “social or spiritual ladder” that placed saints and human aristocrats in a position “between the common rung of humanity” and “the trinity” or “the monarchy.”¹⁸¹ The saints and the lords then gained a level of respect and agency from their association with one another as separate from those below them, slightly closer to God and the King and therefore slightly more powerful, at least in theory. This ideological ladder is precisely what I argue Hill uses to the opposite effect. Rather than associating George or Margaret with Christ, the frontispiece to Hill’s text associates the Harrowing Christ with the nationalistic hero, investing the revived third article with a measure of proto-patriotism.

The descent debates show us that the Harrowing was interpreted in the sixteenth century as integral to law and order and important to defining the Church of England

¹⁸⁰ Alison A. Chapman, *Patrons and Patron Saints in Early Modern English Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 4.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

between the poles of Catholicism and Puritanism. The interpretation of the 3rd article helped the Church of England negotiate the shift from physical ritual to contemplation that defined the subject's relationship to God. Marlowe's character of Faustus is a figure of the Harrowing Christ because he uses juridical rhetoric to harrow Mephistopheles and Lucifer of their rights to his soul. Reading Faustus through the lens of the Harrowing redeems him as a tragic hero by showing how his actions emulate Christ and are magnanimous rather than petty. Additionally, Faustus' use of juridical rhetoric points to the way legal contracts created a dispersed agency (empowering for the margin as well as the center) in early modern England.

Debating Christ's Descent

The debates over Christ's descent into hell show us how the tradition of the Harrowing is translated from medieval to early modern culture. While many aspects of the Harrowing remain in the early modern retellings, such as the emphasis on Christ's victory and magical power, the theatricality of the entire scene, and the focus on negotiating social positions by changing the law, some elements must be rethought in a new context. As we saw in the previous chapter, Spenser struggles with the idea of a spiritual agent in a new Protestant context, and Protestant theologians were divided on the issue of the descent precisely because of the logical issues inherent in predestination and contemplation. In particular, Carlile, Hill, and Hume show a focus on law and social order and an attempt to move from bodily to verbal confrontation that is mirrored in the Renaissance emphasis on rhetorical skill over military prowess. This movement from

visible to invisible, physical to mental is also a feature of the Protestant Reformation's focus on contemplation.

Understanding why early modern theologians and literary artists continued to discuss and reinterpret the Harrowing of Hell might best begin with an examination of what the theologians explicitly state are the stakes of their arguments. Carlile emphasizes the importance of the doctrine of Christ's descent to both early modern conceptions of law and the role fables and fantasies play in adherence to the law. In his dedication he writes:

Idolatry and blasphemie are to be corrected by the ciuill magistrate: and in like maner, the corruption of maners: as Moses decreed, by the voice of Iehoua, and setteth downe Godly Lawes to that effect. Errors in doctrine are to be reformed by examination: the authors thereof reduced by perswasion, conuincd by the worde, and reconciled by exhortation, and mutuall conference. (A2r)¹⁸²

For Carlile, the peaceful governance of the country depends on the correction of misunderstandings in doctrine. Jarring as it may seem to modern readers who depend upon a separation between church and state, Carlile's emphasis is on the interrelatedness of the two bodies. The civil magistrate should correct infractions of the Ten Commandments, just as though they were crimes against the state. However, Carlile's

¹⁸² Christopher Carlile, *A Discourse, Concerning Two Diuine Positions the First [Ef]fectually Concluding, That the Soules of the Faithfull Fathers, Deceased before Christ, Went Immediately to Heauen. The Second Sufficientlye Setting Foorth Vnto Vs Christians, What We Are to Conceiue, Touching the Descension of Our Sauour Christ into Hell: Publicly Disputed at a Commencement in Cambridge, Anno Domini 1552. Purposely Written at the First by Way of a Confutation, against a Booke of Richard Smith of Oxford, D. Of Diuinity, Entitled a Refutation, Imprinted 1562, & Published against Iohn Caluin, & C. Carlile: The Title Whereof Appeareth in Ye 17. Page. And Now First Published by the Said Christopher Carlile, 1582.* Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 202:01. Imprinted at London : By Roger Ward dwelling by Holborne conduit, at the signe of the Talbot, Anno 1582., 1582.

correction consists of questioning and persuasion rather than force or torture. Those individuals who do not see doctrine the same way that he does should be brought to light through convincing dialogue and rhetoric. To the reader, he explains that the doctrine of the descent needs to be examined “for avoiding of fables, and pernicious heresies” (A4r). The language directed to the reader is quite a bit more severe than the language directed to the Earl. The reader must guard himself or herself against believing in comforting fables, which disguise harmful interpretations of doctrine. Heresy was a serious accusation, and it is significant that Carlile uses this term rather than the milder “errors in doctrine” with the readers. The stakes of his argument are quite high.

Similarly, Adam Hill, writing to the Archbishop of Canterbury, also asserts that correct understanding of doctrine leads to a well-governed country. He maintains that the fact that ministers around England are preaching against the doctrine of the descent is a victory for the Catholics, atheists, and any others who wish to see England divided. “The Preachers do vpon this occasion striue more bitterly one against another, then either of both do against our common aduersarye” (A3v).¹⁸³ England had many common adversaries, including the Catholics, the Puritans, the Jews, and just about all the foreigners. Hill points out that the infighting that results from differences of doctrinal opinion is hazardous for the welfare of the newly formed Church of England. Hill also insists that this is a matter of governance and law:

¹⁸³ Adam Hill, *The Defence of the Article: Christ Descended into Hell Vvith Arguments Obiected against the Truth of the Same Doctrine: Of One Alexander Humes. All Which Reasons Are Confuted, and the Same Doctrine Cleerely Defended. By Adam Hyll, D. Of Diuinity*. Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 345:12. edited by Alexander schoolmaster Hume: At London : Printed [by John Windet] for William Ponsonbie, 1592., 1592.

In that vnder her most excellent Maiestie you rule men, you must vse continuall care and vigilancy. In that you must rule by laws, you may not for feare of superior or multitude for loue of freends, for hatred of enemy, nor for desire of reward, leaue the laws of your Countrie vnexecuted. (A4r)

Speaking to the Archbishop, Hill emphasizes Elizabeth's reliance on ministers to govern the country. He makes it clear that no personal gain or kinship should influence the Archbishop's ability to enforce a single, standard reading of the article of the descent. Consistency in the execution of the law is paramount to all other concerns. Carlile and Hill occupy a rather privileged place in that they seek to persuade aristocratic men through their arguments, and their references to law are made in such a way as to influence the way that the country is being governed. Alexander Hume's dedication and explanation in the beginning of his response to Adam Hill demonstrates how severe the consequences might be for being on the wrong side of the debate if one is not powerful and protected.

Alexander Hume's entrance into the discussion is marked by a very different tone that is clearly related to the difference in his position from those of Carlile and Hill. Writing to the Earl of Essex, Hume emphasizes his unwillingness to participate in the public debate that he is drawn into by Hill's publishing the contents of his private letters in his pamphlet. He insists, "Being priuate, I endeoured to keepe myself within the boundes of my condition" (A3r). Hume does not emphasize law, but, instead, he shows how his logic requires an aristocratic name to be accepted:

Yet because manie minds are swayed with affection of the man, or with conceit of the matter: and my name came neuer neere so manie eares, as this booke is like to

come in mouths: I haue resolued to commend it to your honor. Hoping, that if your name win minds to read the waight of my reasons, shall turne the scales, and winne heartes to beleeeue. (A3r)¹⁸⁴

Though Hume never explicitly mentions that he requires the Earl's protection to engage in the debate, the implication of his argument is that he does not have the necessary ethos to speak against Hill or the Archbishop without support. On the other hand, the debate actually allows Hume, a Scottish school teacher, to participate in conversations about the framing of law and doctrine in the early modern period so long as he frames his contributions as submitted to and approved by the aristocratic male governors prior to publication.

Thus the debates over Christ's descent, as part of larger theological debates in the period and as they took place in the late sixteenth century, impinge upon how early modern subjects understood the law as operating in society and how scholars now understand the subject's participation in law and debate. Why the question of this particular doctrine relates specifically to law has to do with the content of the narrative from which the doctrine draws. The Harrowing of Hell narrative, as discussed in chapter one, or Christ's descent as it is framed by these Elizabethan theologians, focuses on the change in law between the Old Testament covenant between man and God to the New Testament reformulation of that covenant between man and Christ and God. While these

¹⁸⁴ Alexander Hume, *A Reioynder to Doctor Hil Concerning the Descense of Christ into Hell Wherein the Answere to His Sermon Is Iustlie Defended, and the Roust of His Reply Scraped from Those Arguments as Cleanlie, as If They Had Neuer Bene Touched with That Canker. By Alexander Hume, Maister of Artes. Heere, Besides the Reioynder, Thou Hast His Paralogismes: That Is, His Fallacies and Deceits in Reason Pointed out, and Numbered in the Margin: Amounting to the Number of 600. And Aboue: And yet Not Half Reckoned.* Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 1353:04. (Edinburgh : Robert Waldegrave, 1594).

issues are often discussed without reference to Satan or hell, in the context of the Harrowing/descent, evil has a place and a role in the forming and reforming of these covenants that Faustus takes up in his debates with Mephistopheles. How the law is conceived affects the formation and conception of the early modern subject as an agent in and under that law, and the debates about whether or not Christ descended into hell quickly move from an idea of governance to the conception of what it means to be alive or dead, and by extension in this case, what it means to be divine or mortal.

The Debate over Christ's descent often begins with the question of hell and whether Christ descended in the spirit or in the flesh or in both the spirit and the flesh. This aspect of the debate has interesting implications for the early modern understanding of the self. Christopher Carlile insists that there is a difference between a soul and a man:

When wee saye that Iacob, or any other man is dead, we meane not that his soule is dead, whiche can not dye, for it is immortall. A deade man is called a man, but a soule is never called a man after that it is departed, but a soule. Wherefore by your owne fantasie it was the bodye of Iacob that went to hell. Iacob sayde that hey would bring his gray heares to the graue: hee doeth not call his gray heares his soule, neighter are there any graye heares in heauen nor yet in hell: for they consume in the graue. (B5r)

Carlile's interpretation of scripture involves maintaining a strict understanding of the soul as both good and belonging to God. This is representative of Calvinist theology's influence on received medieval doctrine. For Carlile, the human soul is God's property, and it cannot go to hell unless it is not elect. Predestination insists that God has always known who is saved and who is damned and that no human activity can change those impending events. If this theology calls into question human agency and free will in

general, it also directly refutes the logic of the Harrowing, which quietly implies that God changed his mind and sent Christ to undo the punishment he himself inflicted upon mankind through Adam and Eve. Carlile's translation of the scripture is consistent with his understanding of the afterlife as rigidly delineated between morally good and bad subjects. Good souls cannot enter hell, and bodies cannot enter heaven or hell. Carlile borders on an inability to explain exactly what is in hell because he is so concerned with making it known that neither Christ's soul, nor the souls of any of the patriarchs, could have been there. Bodies consume in the grave, and souls go to heaven or hell. Only serious misunderstanding, the work of the fantasy-inducing parts of the brain, can indicate that a body goes to hell.

Adam Hill notes that Christ's soul goes down to hell, but that his body stays in the grave. For Hill, the separation of body and soul is significant because it proves death:

Is not resurrection contrary to death? And what thing is death but the seperation of the body and the soule? And what other thing then can resurrection be, but a renuing and knitting to gether againe of the bodye and the soule. (C2r)

Death cannot occur unless the soul leaves the body completely, and for Hill, this means that to deny the descent is to deny that Jesus died and thus also that he was resurrected. In this way, Hill agrees with Carlile that bodies do not go to hell, but he insists that Christ's soul had to leave the body (and the grave) in order for Christ to have fully died. The soul had to be completely severed from the body and return to it to be reknitted together in order for Christ to be fully resurrected. For Hill, and others who believed in the descent, the soul's ability to leave the body and act on its own is a form of supernatural agency

that belongs to Christ. Christ's body is not corrupted in the grave and his soul descends to hell to preach the truth to the damned, a fact which fully realizes Christ's victory over evil according to Hill. This is the ultimate act sign of victory over the forces of evil:

The divels by experience of the maiestie and authroitte of the Sonne of God do confesse him to have all power, and as over these, so over all hellish spirits...this then is the end of Christs going down into hel, that the infernall spirits might be subicated to him, and that they might confesse him to be the Sonne of God to their endless shame, and everlasting glory of God the father. (C4r-C4v)

Thus the ability to have full possession of one's soul and to send that soul to speak and preach to one's enemies is the ultimate expression of power and majesty. Hill's version of the events is a much more compelling one to the authorities of the Church of England at the time, and it may be because the idea that Christ can send out his soul to defeat evil is such a compellingly dramatic possibility that it seems similar to Faustus's understanding of the relationship between his body and soul.

Faustus as Agent and Object

The Harrowing Christ is a surprising narrative for modern audiences because we no longer associate the magician or the rebel with religious figures, but Faustus has features that readily identify him with any version of Christ. A close examination of his motivations for studying magic shows that he presents himself as an altruistic mediator and his conception of the relationship between his body and his soul provides him with the means to use his body as a tradable commodity. At least at the outset of the play, Faustus's goals are to better the world around him and be seen as a benefactor. Even in

his negotiation of the contract between himself and Lucifer, Faustus experiences his life and body as separate and serving a purpose larger than himself. Similarly to Christ he is both agent and object—the creator of his deal with Lucifer and the payment for it. Because he sees himself as both an agent and an object, Faustus also uses his redemption via Christ’s sacrifice as a trap for Mephistopheles and Lucifer. Like Christ who uses his divinity as a hook hiding under the bait of his humanity in order to defeat hell, Faustus hides his faith and repentance from Mephistopheles and Lucifer throughout the play. Seeing Faustus as a Christ-figure enables the audience to identify with him and have sympathy for his plight with and against Mephistopheles and Lucifer.

One of the ways that Faustus can most obviously be seen as a figure of Christ is by acknowledging the altruism that motivates his turn to magic in the first place. *Doctor Faustus* opens with something akin to a Christmas wish list. Faustus enumerates all the things he wants but cannot get from his traditional courses of study. Many critics have pointed out the economic and sexual focus of this list, but rarely have we taken seriously Faustus’s more altruistic desires.¹⁸⁵ At the outset, Faustus truly desires the ability to manipulate and control the supernatural himself. He says of the study of logic: “Affords this art no greater miracle?” (I.i.9)¹⁸⁶ The use of the word miracle is especially significant in its differentiation from magic and magic tricks. As discussed in Chapter 2, miracles are the apotheosis of magic that last past the performance and do more than gratify the

¹⁸⁵ For more information about Faustus’s desire for money and sex, see Myka Tucker-Abramson, “Is Marlowe a Marxist?,” and Richard Halpern, “Marlowe’s Theater of Night: ‘Doctor Faustus’ and Capital.” *English Literary History* 71, no. 2 (2004): 455-95. Tucker-Abramson maintains that “Faustus’s relationship to Catholicism and Protestantism is always mediated through the emergency of early capitalism” (289). Halpern argues that Faustus wishes to be “annihilated...through a consuming sexual conflagration” (485).

¹⁸⁶ All quotations are taken from the David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen A-text.

magician.¹⁸⁷ He further specifies what kind of miracle he wants when he articulates the limits of medicine:

Wouldst thou make man to live eternally,
Or, being dead, raise them to life again,
Then this profession were to be esteemed. (I.i.24-26)

These lines show that Faustus is not simply interested in his own benefit, as dreams of infinite income or sultry sexual encounters would indicate, but he wants to make “man” in general to live eternally or raise “them” from the dead. These particular miracles are clearly the purview of Christ. Christ is the one who can make man to live eternally through his sacrifice on the cross, and Christ’s action in the Harrowing is particularly to take those who are dead and raise them to eternal life. The fact that Faustus desires these particular supernatural abilities shows the audience a giving Faustus who practices art for the benefit of others, showing his affinity to Jesus as he is portrayed in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. At the outset of the play, Faustus wants to perform positive actions for the people around him.

Magic will give him the opportunity to perform these altruistic actions. Faustus associates the ability to practice art for the benefit of others with the supernatural power of God. He concludes his wish-list with the lines:

A sound magician is a mighty god.
Here, Faustus, try thy brains to gain a deity. (I.i.64-65)

¹⁸⁷ See the discussion of Jambres and Mambres in Chapter 2.

These lines connect the practice of magic with God in a way that shows that magic may be an ethical choice for Faustus. He uses the word “sound” to describe the magician, which according to the *OED* can mean “healthy or robust,” but it can also mean “theologically correct, orthodox,” or “characterized by well-grounded principles or good practical knowledge.”¹⁸⁸ Perhaps none of these senses are what we would usually associate with the magician, except in the case of the cunning folk who designate themselves “good” or “useful” practitioners of magic in the period, but the *OED* clearly shows that all these definitions, including the idea that “sound” is associated with theology, are all in use at the time of composition. The close relationship between magic and miracle is identified from the outset of the miraculous, and it is instead the modern tendency to separate magic and miracle that prevents us from seeing these concepts as conjoined as they would have been for Faustus. The Middle English *Gospel of Nicodemus* also links magic and miracle in the case of bringing people back from the dead. When the Jews bring Jesus before Pilate, they accuse him of false charming and healing the sick on the Sabbath:

“Oure law vs leres (teach),” þan said a Iew,
 “þe sabot (Sabbath) to do no thing;
 Þan wirkes he wonder werkes new,
 Heles al þat askes heleing,
 Þe croked cripilles þat we knew,
 Þis es a wonder thing;
 he makes þam hale of hide & hew
 thurgh his fals charmeing.” (25-26)¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ “sound, adj.”. *OED Online*. June 2013. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/185128> (accessed June 19, 2013).

¹⁸⁹ Hulme, *The Middle-English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus*. This text and the associations between Christ’s miracles and magic are discussed more fully in Chapter 2.

The Jews accuse Christ of practicing the same kind of magic that Faustus asks to be able to perform in the outset of the play, and for the author of the *Gospel*, this becomes a measure of the Jewish inability to understand the larger picture of Jesus's divinity.

Because they refuse to take motivation into account when moralizing their definitions of magic, they cannot read Jesus or define him correctly. They link the ability to heal people and raise the dead with the false charming that must come from the devil, but even Pilate knows that this is not black magic but miracle, and he tells the Jews so:

Pan said pilat: "ȝe have no right
to blame him by no way;
his miracles musters his might,
it es noght als ȝe say" (26)

By changing the terms of trial and correctly recognizing Jesus's motivation as central to the definition of his acts or crimes, Pilate becomes the sympathetic character who stands up for Jesus to the Jews who accuse him. Pilate defines healing the sick and raising the dead as miracle rather than magic. Faustus also defines these supernatural powers as miracle. Reading Marlowe's play through the lens of the Harrowing suggests that how the audience interprets these lines indicates something about their theological understanding. Interpreting Faustus's desire to raise the dead and be a "sound magician" as something other than altruistic working of miracle could potentially align the audience members with the Jews in their persecution of Christ. Though the separation between magic and miracle seems like an obvious one in a post-empiricist world, the early modern

argument may well have been that motivation defines magic.¹⁹⁰ Thus Faustus's initial intentions for practicing magic are important markers of the worthiness of the magic itself.

In addition to his more benevolent motivations, Faustus's ability to see his soul and his body as separable commodities links him with Jesus Christ. Jesus is both an agent and an object. As an actor, he embodies the Christian lifestyle and the choices his followers are to make. His most recognizable choice, sacrificing himself on the cross, becomes the vehicle through which he becomes an object. The Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation highlights this transition from agent to object and further objectifies the body by suggesting that it can be consumed and spiritually feed the congregation. While this doctrine and its attendant sacrament of the Eucharist were highly contested in Reformation England, Christ's status as the embodiment of divine will and the payment for the sins of mankind were not points in question. What is surprising about *Doctor Faustus* then is not that Christ's blood is the symbol for his ability to save believers but that the blood fails to circulate to Faustus himself. Christ's blood is circulated as evidence of the redemption. Through the emulation of Christ, Faustus takes part in the changing of the self to share with another. As Lowell Gallagher points out, "Faustus's blood presents

¹⁹⁰ Richard Lachmann argued, "In other words, people of the Renaissance decided what to believe in part by settling upon whom to believe" in "State, Church, and the Disestablishment of Magic: Orthodoxy and Dissent in Post-Reformation England and France" in *The Production of English Renaissance Culture*, edited by Sharon O'Dair David Lee Miller, Harold Weber. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994): 56-92. An argument based on ethos becomes tautological when looking at Christ figures, however, so I emphasize here that magic itself contained the signs of its credibility. One of these important signs is intent or motivation.

an unusual compound of these biblical and devotional blood covenants.”¹⁹¹ The use of blood calls to mind Christ’s blood that circulates freely among believers through the Catholic sacrament, which in turn calls to mind the covenant and payment the Harrowing enacts. Faustus describes a vision of Christ’s blood:

See, see where Christ’s blood streams in the firmament!
One drop would save my soul, half a drop. Ah, my Christ! (V.ii.78-79)

Christ’s blood is freely spread, but it seems not to come near Faustus. By indicating a moment of hesitation between self-sacrifice and self-gratification, the congealing of the blood points to the recognition of loss and sacrifice inherent in sharing and dissemination.

The focus on blood in the play also connects Faustus and Christ as both are depicted as having blood simultaneously fated to and unwilling to be shared with others. Marlowe draws attention to Faustus’s blood when he is ready to sign over the rights to his soul to Lucifer. Faustus says,

Ay, so I will. But Mephistopheles,
My blood congeals, and I can write no more. (II.i.61-62)

On the face of it, the signature in blood seems appropriately horrific and gory for a satanic pact; however, the blood and its unwillingness to be signed over to Satan also signify God’s decision to enter into a covenant with his people and its ritualization through Christ and his followers. Faustus asks,

¹⁹¹ Lowell Gallagher, “Faustus’s Blood and the (Messianic) Question of Ethics.” *English Literary History* 73, no. 1 (2006): 1-29, 9.

What might the staying of my blood portend?
Is it unwilling I should write this bill?
Why streams it not, that I may write afresh?
'Faustus gives to thee his soul'—ah, there it stayed!
Why shouldst thou not? Is not thy soul thine own? (II.i.64-69)
...
So; now the blood begins to clear again,
Now will I make an end immediately (II.i.71-72)

This moment of suspense in the play highlights the transition period between agent and object by focusing on the exact instant when Faustus will breach the divide between an actor who chooses or rejects cerebral and physical activities at his whim and the payment for his impending debt to Lucifer. The tremendous amount of agency Faustus gives to his own blood in this passage is indicative of his own fears in becoming an object. He says his blood is “unwilling” and that it refuses to stream it “stays,” but as an object the blood should not have a will. It should not be able to refuse. To look at this moment in the play as a moment of death, sacrifice, or crucifixion is to insist that Faustus dies here, as traditional theological readings of the tragedy would suggest. That his blood “clears” and he can indeed give his soul to Lucifer is an indication of his immediate end. The context of the Harrowing of Hell, however, makes of this a beginning. Jesus’s transition from agent to object only transforms him into both agent and object simultaneously when he descends to confront Satan. In Marlowe’s play, Faustus’s deal with Lucifer for Mephistopheles’s company is only the beginning of his story. Marlowe associates Faustus with Christ in order to re-present the actions of the Harrowing as a direct argument against the results of predestination theology. Faustus then uses his supernatural agency to fight for his salvation.

Faustus's Rhetoric and Use of the Law

Both the narrative of the Harrowing and *Doctor Faustus* feature legal issues prominently. As discussed in the introduction and Chapter 2, the Harrowing is one way of working out the details of the covenant between God and man created at the Fall and enacted through Christ's death and resurrection. The general sense of this contract is that God created Adam and Eve, and therefore they were his property. However, since Adam and Eve disobeyed him, God gave the rights to them to the devil as punishment: they were to die as a result of their sin. The devil then maintains the rights to the souls of Adam and Eve and all their kin until Christ sacrifices himself—a man without sin—in order to make payment for them and restore them to God. The Harrowing of Hell is the scene in which this transaction takes place and is dramatized. Though, according to Christian theology, God must always be considered just, the mercy of Christ sets the Christian believers right with God and destroys the claim or power that the devil had over them. The law in the Harrowing relates directly to cosmic order in a way that law in early modern England relates to social order. The law in both cases is an intermediary between hierarchical elements, but it is not static. The law changes to reflect and craft the spiritual and social relationships between God or the King and the people. Though Faustus rejects the law as a course of study in the first scene of the play, the legal references that he makes in Latin bring up issues central to the covenant and Harrowing. He then settles on magic as a course of study/action which leads him directly back to law through the use of a contract to gain access to Mephistopheles' supernatural power, proving that, in early

modern England, the discourses of the law and religion are inseparable on a practical level.

Though the biblical covenants between God and man usually refer to ones made between God and Abraham, God and Noah, or God and David, there is an implicit covenant in Genesis between God and Adam and Satan or Death. God gives Adam and Eve the garden and all the staples they need in return for obedience and worship, but if Adam and Eve disobey or fail to worship God, they have to work for their necessities and they must die. Though Genesis does not make this arrangement explicit, nor does it personify Death or link Satan and Death in a palpable way, Christian theological interpretation of virtually every sect treats this transaction as a contract broken by Adam. In the Middle Ages, this theology was elaborated upon through the concept of the Devil's rights, which I will discuss further below. In *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe highlights the similarities between this original, and in a way congenital, relationship and the witchcraft pact by making Faustus's body and soul the site for the playing out of this legalistic logic. The covenant between God, Satan, and Christ is made miniature and concretized in the battle over Faustus's soul. Throughout the play, Faustus attempts to harrow Lucifer of his rights by threatening to turn to Christ or by bringing up reasons why Lucifer cannot maintain the rights to Faustus's soul even after Faustus has signed his deed with blood. He uses a type of juridical rhetoric to perform this harrowing.

In the first scene of the play, Faustus cursorily rejects the study of law between medicine and theology, but he never names it as its own discipline. This may be a consequence of the law's omnipresence and interrelatedness in the early modern

understanding of knowledge. Interestingly, however, Marlowe's placement of the law just before theology and his specific choices of parts of the law to highlight and reject point to an interest in the potentiality for injustice in God's law or for argument about how God's law plays out in specific circumstances. Faustus gives two quotations from Justinian's *Institutes*. The first deals with "paltry legacies": "If one and the same thing is given as a legacy to two persons, one shall have the thing, the other the value of the thing" (I.i.28-29, translation from note). The second quotation from Justinian also deals with inheritance: "A father cannot disinherit his son unless—" (I.i.31, translation from note). These specific references may be random choices, or they could relate thematically to the issue of inheritance between Faustus and Wagner as it plays out later in the play, but the specific choices here take on new meaning when read in the context of the Harrowing of Hell, the Devil's rights, and the debate between Christ and Satan as it is presented in several medieval texts. The first quotation can refer to the fact that the major debate of the Harrowing deals with a legacy given to both Jesus and Satan: the souls of mankind. As Eric Rasmussen points out in his note on this passage in the Revels Plays edition, there is a slight error in the quotation. Justinian should read that "each is entitled to only half." Because the change "would be hard to hear in Latin in the play house," Rasmussen suggests that the error "may be nothing more than an approximation of memory."¹⁹² However, in the context of both the debate between Christ and Satan in hell and the debates on Christ's descent into hell, the change from "each is entitled to half" to dividing the "thing" from the "value of the thing" becomes highly significant. If the

¹⁹² Rasmussen, note, page 111.

“thing” is the dead body and the “value of the thing” is the soul,” God’s legacy of mankind is rightfully divided between Satan and Christ because, as many of the theologians, including Carlile, point out, the bodies, even of the elect, are in the ground, but the souls belong in heaven. Thus, Satan has the thing itself, but Christ and God get the value of the thing. Faustus attempts to work this same logic on Lucifer and Mephistopheles when he negotiates the contract, a scene I discuss in detail below.

The second quotation then follows logically after the first as further speculation and argument over the legacy of mankind. If the father, or God, cannot disinherit his son, or the Son, Christ, then salvation must be effective regardless of sin as long as there is faith. This has thematic significance for the bible passages Faustus quotes just a few lines afterward and for Faustus’s fate in the play as a whole. Faustus says that the reward of sin is death, and that is “hard,” but his understanding of the new law through the Harrowing counters his statement. The reward of sin is death, *but* the Father cannot disinherit the Son. The souls of mankind must be delivered to heaven. Though I would not argue that Marlowe shows particularly Calvinist leanings in his reinterpretation of the Harrowing of Hell, this is a specifically Calvinist or predestination-related argument.¹⁹³ One of the reasons that Carlile states that Christ cannot have harrowed hell in the sense that he brought back souls of the righteous patriarchs is that God would not ever allow elect to be in hell in the first place. Faustus explicitly links the law to theology after the second

¹⁹³ Calvinist support for the Harrowing used predestination as an argument against Christ’s bringing back any souls of the dead because God would not allow any elect soul to spend time in hell--see the discussion of Calvin’s interpretation of this line in the Apostle’s Creed in the Introduction. I contend throughout that Marlowe was more interested in the human ability to effect one’s own fate or salvation than in supporting the doctrine of predestination.

Justinian quotation in order to emphasize choices and human agency as significant to the theological issues at stake in the Harrowing of Hell: “Such is the subject of the Institute / And universal body of the Church” (I.i.32-33). Here the subject of the *Institutes* relates directly to the universal body of the Church, which is both the body of Christ who is shared throughout the Church and the body as in the souls of the congregation, its members. This reference to ecclesiastical polity shows again the interrelatedness of the order of society and the order of the cosmos as understood through the interconnectedness of the discourses of law and religion. The context of the descent debates shows how Marlowe navigates the numerous sectarian positions and recreates a theatrical and suspenseful harrowing play that modernizes the original concepts without secularizing them. He brings the harrowing narrative out of the Middle Ages by reinterpreting the Old Law and making it immediately relevant to a single, identifiable character.

Legal rights and contracts are an important site of agency for early modern subjects, and reading Faustus’s deal with Lucifer in the context of the Harrowing of Hell and the tradition of the Devil’s Rights illustrates how Faustus seizes this agency in through Christ’s ritualized debate. Kathryn Schwarz argues that social contracts and constraints require a double agency of creation and acquiescence. Participants in a contract both produce the law and subject themselves to the law in the course of constructing a contract. Schwarz writes:

Covenants of allegiance, affiliation, fidelity, and reciprocity have their basis in the capacity of persons to agree within and among themselves, to formulate priorities

of intercourse that work against the drives of dominance and opposition, but respond to a more foundational imperative of coexistence...Contractual agreements, in their more abstract and codified configurations, articulate a condition of interdependence that preexists and preconceives particular expressions of obligation and guarantee. That interdependence is a result not of organic unity or natural law, but of pragmatic and often laborious practices which turn unpredictable intentions and desires toward workable accommodations...Their contingent intricacies are routinely masked by more absolute precepts and structures: imposition transmutes participation; hierarchy disguises mutuality; control overwrites consent.¹⁹⁴

This indicates that though the law presents itself as supporting hierarchical relationships and early modern social structures, contracts simultaneously and intrinsically equalize social relations and bring subjects of the law into horizontal relationships based on interdependence. They depend on the mutual capacity for consent at the same time that they make legible and undergird social terms and hierarchical power structures. Rather than seeing the law as something that is handed down from on high or put into place for the sole purpose of protecting the powerful, Schwarz shows that contract law provides agency for a wide swath of English subjects. The devil's rights theory, the Harrowing, and the descent debates all indicate these possibilities are ever-present in *Doctor Faustus*. Christ and Satan, Faustus and Mephistopheles are brought into more equal standing, or at least the presumption of more equal standing, through the contracts that bind them to one another.

¹⁹⁴ Kathryn Schwarz, *What You Will: Gender, Contract, and Shakespearean Social Space* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 3.

The conception of the law as both constraining and generative produces different readings of specific laws in the period. Reading Faustus's contract in terms of the 1604 law against making contracts with the devil, Luke Wilson maintains,

The contractualist ideology of mutual, voluntary agreements... articulates a dialectics of agency that is deeply embedded in discourses about the devil's relation to human beings, and puts this ideology under significant strain, since...demonic pacts so often appear coercive, preposterous, or otherwise infelicitous, imperfect, or impossible.¹⁹⁵

As Wilson points out, however, these laws were written with new economic circumstances in mind, and while Faustus has nothing tangible to offer Lucifer for his twenty-four years of life—a fact that would indeed make the contract imperfect or impossible, he and Lucifer are acutely aware of the value of his soul and his apparent control over its final destination. Furthermore, the contract between Faustus and Mephistopheles is anything but “coercive” or “preposterous.” Faustus very calmly bequeaths his soul to Lucifer for a very definite payment; there is no evidence of coercion. More importantly, however, this view of the law ignores the interrelationship between contract and covenant, the close affinity any man-made law in the period has to the interpretation of the received law of God. Faustus's participation in the contract he enters into within the play is influenced and made possible by the previous contract between God, Christ, and Satan. It is necessary to view Faustus's contract in the context of the older, debatable one in order to understand Faustus's sense of agency and his almost flippant attitude toward damnation in the play.

¹⁹⁵ Wilson, *Theaters of Intention*, 190.

Like Christ who descends into hell to defeat Satan but uses very little physical force, all of Faustus's confrontations with Mephistopheles and Lucifer are rhetorical rather than physical in nature. Though in the B-Text, demons pull Faustus body into pieces, the A-Text shows no sign of physical violence from either party toward the other. It may seem surprising that the arguments between Faustus and Mephistopheles or Faustus and Lucifer are so orderly; however, there is a history of orderly and law-governed interactions between good and evil. As discussed in Chapter 2, William Langland's *Piers Plowman* takes up the issues of contract, negotiation, and debate in the Harrowing of Hell. Christ's use of juridical rhetoric in Langland's text could easily have served as the model for Faustus's debates with Mephistopheles and Lucifer. Marlowe and Langland represent these problems in ways that resist a neat or easy understanding of contractual relationships. In both *Piers Plowman* and *Doctor Faustus*, Lucifer takes the side of the law, leaving the other party (Christ or Faustus), the party with whom the audience is being led to identify affectively, to argue his way out of the law. In Langland, several of the demons are differentiated that are now generally coalesced into one Satan figure. Lucifer and Satan have a pre-debate about Christ's coming. Lucifer complains that if Christ takes away the souls in hell he is a thief:

If he reve me my righte he robbeth me by maistrye.
For by right and bi resoun tho renkes that ben here
Bodey and soule ben myne, bothe gode and ille.
For himself seyde that Sire is of Hevene,
Yif Adam ete the apple, alle shulde deye
And dwelle with us devels: this thretynge [Drighten] made.
And [sittthen] he that Sothenesse is seyde thise words,

And sitthen I seised sevene hundredth wynfre,
I leve that lawe nil naughte lete hym the leest. (XVIII, 277-285)¹⁹⁶

As in *Doctor Faustus*, Lucifer's logic is virtually impeccable in this context. His faith in the system is complete in that he recognizes the law as being handed down from "Sothenesse" and that breaking the law would be robbing him. He explains the law clearly and simply: God gave mankind, both body and soul, to Lucifer for all eternity because he ate the apple. As far as Lucifer is concerned nothing has happened that would change or alter that law in any way.

Christ, on the other hand, insists:

I may the bette hem clayme.
Although Resoun recorde, and right of myself,
That if thei ete the apple alle shulde deye,
I bihyghte hem nought here helle for evere.
For the dede that thei dede, thi deceyte it made;
With gyle thow hem gete agayne al resoun. (XVIII, 327-334)¹⁹⁷

Both Satan and Christ refer to their rights over the souls in hell, but Christ goes on to enumerate the many ways that his rights to the souls are superior to Satan's. The first statement is the most interesting to a conception of the Devil's rights because though

¹⁹⁶ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Passus XVIII, 277-285. "If he bereaves me of my right he robs me by force. / For by right and by reason the race that is here / Body and soul belongs to me, both good and evil. / For he himself said it who is Sire of Heaven, / If Adam ate the apple, all should die / And dwell with us devils: the Lord laid down that threat. / And since he who is Truth himself said these words, / And since I've possessed them seven thousand winters, / I don't believe law will allow him the least of them." (Translation by Robertson and Shepherd).

¹⁹⁷ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Passus XVIII, 327-334. "Lo, here is my soul in payment / For all sinful souls, to save those that are worthy. / Mine they are and of me—I may the better claim them. / Although Reason records, and right of myself, / That if they ate the apple all should die, / I did not hold out to them hell here forever. / For the deed that they did, your deceit caused it; / You got them with guile against all reason." (Translation by Robertson and Shepherd).

Christ goes on to say that Lucifer lost the rights through error; essentially, Christ attests that he is in hell to make the payment for mankind's souls. Christ first admits to needing to pay Lucifer for the souls of mankind: he is the payment. The seemingly contradictory later statements indicate that Lucifer had no rights over the souls to begin with because they originated in God and therefore belonged to him the entire time. Faustus acts on similar logic throughout Marlowe's play. Though his experiences with Mephistopheles and Lucifer result in Faustus shifting from seeing himself as a Christ-like god to recognizing his own mortality and his precarious situation, Faustus never sees himself as helpless or already damned by his interactions with the demonic because he relies on the view of the world where justice is worked out through complex and often contradictory relations between God and Lucifer. Faustus relies on Christ's logic throughout his dealings with Mephistopheles and Lucifer, using his third-party position in the contract against Lucifer's claim to his soul.

In addition to the connections with the living Jesus who is tried before Pilate for using magic and the dying Christ whose blood redeems mankind, Marlowe also ties Faustus to the dead Christ whose body and soul performs the harrowing. Faustus almost always refers to himself in the third person, an idiosyncrasy that seems arrogant at first, but ultimately shows an opportune disconnect between Faustus's body and his soul or his will and his bodily action. The aforementioned "Here, Faustus, try thy brains," is just one example of many. His opening line, "Settle thy studies, Faustus, and begin / To sound the depth of that thou wilt profess" (I.i.1-2), also shows Faustus referring to himself as though he were outside himself in some way. Later in the same speech he says, "A

greater subject fitteth Faustus' wit" (I.i.11). These early examples seem like arrogance. Faustus's speaking of himself in the third person seems to be evidence of the fact that he is "swoll'n with cunning of a self-conceit," as the chorus indicates in line 20. However, it becomes clear when Faustus offers his soul as payment for the ability to practice magic that there are larger, more interesting possibilities that further show the affinities between Faustus and Christ.

The contract that damns Faustus in most interpretations of the play also shows how Faustus's soul and body can be separated and serve separate purposes, a magical ability highlighted by the Harrowing of Hell when Christ offers his soul in payment for the souls of the damned. After Mephistopheles appears in Germany, Faustus says to him:

Go bear these tidings to great Lucifer
...
Say he surrenders up to him his soul,
So he will spare him four-and-twenty years,
Letting him live in all voluptuousness (I.iii.89-94)

The vagueness of these pronouns opens up the reading of these lines in troubling ways. Who surrenders up his soul? The subject surrenders up his soul to whom? Who will spare whom? Who will live in voluptuousness? Under these circumstances, the contract itself becomes indeterminate, and it becomes easy to substitute Christ for Faustus. Christ offers his own soul to Lucifer in payment in both *Piers Plowman* and the cycle plays. In *Piers Plowman*, Christ states to Satan:

“Lo, here my soule to amendes
For alle synneful soules, to save tho that ben worthy” (XVIII.327-328)¹⁹⁸

Christ speaks to Satan in much the same way that Faustus speaks to Lucifer through Mephistopheles in these lines. Both Faustus and Christ offer their souls to the leader of hell as payment for sparing life of some sort. In the case of Faustus, the context of the passage indicates that it is his own life that he asks for, but reading through the lens of the Harrowing shows that even the singularity of Faustus’s claim does not keep the soul from belonging to Christ. Christ describes the souls he claims as “Myne thei be and of me” (XVIII.329). Taken in the larger scope of all humanity, as the Harrowing should be taken according several Church of England theologians, Faustus’s soul is also Christ’s and “of him.” This transference of rights to the soul is a definite concern of Lucifer’s who insists that more clarity is required when Faustus writes the actual deed. Faustus writes:

I, John Faustus of Wittenberg, Doctor, by these presents, do give both body and soul to Lucifer, Prince of the East, and his minister Mephistopheles; and furthermore grant unto them that four-and-twenty years being expired, the articles above written inviolate, full power to fetch or carry the said John Faustus, body and soul, flesh, blood, or goods, into their habitation wheresoever. (II.i.106-112)

¹⁹⁸ William Langland’s *Piers Plowman* is one text that briefly shows the debate between Christ and Satan in hell and clearly connects to the idea of the Devil’s Rights. The debate is shown to be the renegotiation of a contract, one in which both Satan and Christ feel they have rights that have been or are being denied. According to Andrew Galloway, *Medieval Literature and Culture* (New York: Continuum Press, 2006), Langland’s text continued to circulate in the early modern period: “English poetry from the later Middle Ages generally fared slightly better [than banned cycle plays] in the immediate post-medieval centuries. Langland’s *Piers Plowman* enjoyed an enthusiastic but vigorously biased reception by Protestants” (96). The reference to Christ’s justice in Marlowe’s play (II.ii.84-85, discussed further below) shows that these issues continued to be explored, if not as explicitly, in Renaissance texts.

In this rewording of the contract, more specificity is provided about Faustus as an object, but, in turn, Lucifer and hell become less clear. Lucifer is here simply “Prince of the East,” rather than leader of hell, and hell itself is referred to “their habitation wheresoever.” The continually vague terms Faustus offers in this contract leave him room for trickery and deceit, actions that associate him with the Harrowing Christ who “beguiles the beguiler.” Furthermore, both body and soul seem to be given to Lucifer if he can “fetch or carry” them, but who can “fetch or carry” a soul except Christ in the Harrowing? Additionally, Faustus emphasizes the conditional nature of the contract not simply by suggesting that Lucifer can do with his soul what he will or *can*, but by also leaving Mephistopheles’s possible failure to live up to his expectations as a possible breach of the contract that would nullify his responsibilities. He says,

Here, Mephistopheles, receive this scroll,
A deed of gift of body and of soul---
But yet conditionally that thou perform
All articles prescribed between us both. (II.v.95-98)

The contradictory language is carried throughout. He describes the paper as a “deed of gift” but then notes that it is conditional to Mephistopheles’s performance of the articles. The harrowing that Faustus performs here is dependent upon the extension of the logic arising from him being both agent and object like Christ. He conflates and confuses his body and soul so that each serve multiple purposes in his contract in order to keep Lucifer or Mephistopheles from being able to secure a claim on any part of him.

Lucifer's statement to Faustus concerning the justice of Jesus ("Christ cannot save thy soul, for he is just. There's none but I have int'rest in the same" II.ii.84-85), which describes the reality of Faustus's situation—he is not literally saved by Christ in the course of the play and therefore must work to save himself, is best understood in the context of the Devil's right's doctrine. When he writes Lucifer's line to Faustus, "Christ cannot save thy soul, for he is just. There's none but I have int'rest in the same," Marlowe draws on a long medieval tradition of acknowledging the devil's rights (II.ii.84-85). The basic formulation of the Devil's Rights is that God gave the Devil mankind as a just punishment for the Fall. The Devil then justly owns the souls of mankind until payment is made for them in the form of Christ, or, as some arguments indicate, the Devil loses his rights to the souls of mankind by committing a serious crime, in this case, killing the innocent Jesus. C.W. Marx explains that the conception of the Devil's Rights in England changed in the shift from the patristic writings to the vernacular writings:

Medieval theology after Anselm constructed a new understanding of the defeat of the Devil in which the Devil's right to possess humanity continued to be an important question; and the revised formulation of the place of the Devil in the redemption produced the convention of the debate between Christ and the Devil, and in vernacular writing a new version of the harrowing of hell episode.¹⁹⁹

Focusing specifically on English texts after the twelfth century, Marx argues that the vernacular writings bring up the problems with the Devil's Rights not simply to dismiss them or to ridicule the idea of a Satan or Lucifer who is fooled into thinking he has rights

¹⁹⁹ C. W. Marx, *The Devil's Rights and the Redemption in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 1995), 4.

but to emphasize the problematic nature of the contractual relationship between God, Lucifer, and Jesus. The problems are myriad. Why does a good God give mankind to evil? Why does God choose a “just” defeat of Lucifer rather than a militaristic one? What role does Jesus play in the apparently preexisting contract between God and Satan? If the Devil does hold humanity by rights, how does a just God wrest the souls from him and maintain his status as just? Many of these concerns brought up in Chapter 2 that are played out through the debates between Christ and Satan in the Harrowing of Hell texts reappear in Faustus’s interactions with Mephistopheles and Lucifer. Faustus’s juridical rhetoric takes advantage of the slippage between Christ and mankind as interested parties and as payments. At some moments in the play, Faustus behaves as though he were the plaintiff, and at others he plays a third-party role. He purposefully conflates his agency and his objectivity in order to keep Lucifer and Mephistopheles on the defensive. Marx explains that the doctrine of the Devil’s Rights dates back to Augustine and is fundamental to the understanding of law, redemption, and social practices of othering:

The actions of the Devil are the mirror image of the values which Augustine seeks to reinforce: God chose to defeat the Devil in a just manner in order to provide a model for human practice. The theme of *iustitia* is a central one in the history of the medieval doctrine of the redemption, and the various ways in which it is reformulated reveal fundamental shifts in the way evil, or what is alien to human order and society, the Other, is perceived.²⁰⁰

Marx shows the emphasis on a just God who uses the episode of the debate in the Harrowing to model appropriate behavior and leadership for mankind. Lucifer’s actions

²⁰⁰ Marx, *The Devil’s Rights and the Redemption in the Literature of Medieval England*, 9.

before the fall represent the undermining of a just system for Augustine, but the questioning of the Devil's Rights that continues through the late Middle Ages and into the Renaissance problematizes an unquestioning acceptance of Lucifer as wrong and Christ as right. Instead, the literary formulations bring up the idea that God and Jesus must defeat Satan by using his own terms, becoming the beguilers to obtain the spoils of mankind's souls. The idea of social order concurrently handed down from on high and maintained from below is a familiar one in our understanding of Renaissance society with its continuous homologies to the orderly household and body. Thus, God's decision to treat the Devil justly and according to laws would reinforce the emphasis on monarchical law as creating an orderly state emphasized in England since the reign of Henry II. But at the same time that this episode has the potential to present social order as uncomplicatedly handed down from on high, it stages potential disruptions of that social order by questioning the righteousness of the preexisting system.

Mephistopheles indicates the anxiety Lucifer feels over the contractual relationship when he says:

But, Faustus, thou must bequeath it solemnly
And write a deed of gift with thine own blood,
For that security craves great Lucifer.
If thou deny it, I will back to hell. (II.i.34-37)

The lack of written surety of deliverance is a deal breaker for Lucifer. He is unwilling to gamble for the chance at seizing Faustus's soul, even at the small price of Mephistopheles's playing games for a few years. This anxiety indicates the high value

Lucifer places on Faustus's soul and the tenuous relationship of the contract, since Christ has claimed his soul with the crucifixion and all Faustus has to do is repent to save himself. In other words, Faustus's will toward honoring the contract is the only thing that keeps the contract valid. As soon as Faustus chooses Christ and redemption, his soul belongs to Christ and is no longer forfeit to Satan. Faustus uses this advantage continually through the rest of play to the great chagrin of both Mephistopheles and Lucifer. Here we see Faustus using his rhetorical skill and his power of speech, not to conjure demons, but to harrow or rob Satan of his rights.

There are several examples of these verbal attacks that serve to threaten and harass Lucifer throughout the play. Faustus calls on Christ to save his soul long after he signs the deed of gift in blood. The first time he takes this recourse, the act so worries Mephistopheles that he leaves to get Lucifer. Faustus yells to his retreating form:

Ay, go accursed spirit, to ugly hell!
'Tis thou has damned distressed Faustus' soul. (II.iii.75-76)

Here Faustus makes a claim similar to the one Christ makes about Satan's tricking Adam. Contrary to a reading of the play that indicates that Mephistopheles and Lucifer have already won when they get Faustus to sign in blood or that Faustus is reprobate at the onset, understanding this exchange in terms of the harrowing shows how empowered and threatening Faustus's actions are. He then calls on Christ:

Ah, Christ, my Savior,
Seek to save distressed Faustus' soul! (II.iii.82-83)

If, as a predestination theology would suggest, Faustus's soul is already Lucifer's, this call to Christ would hardly warrant the appearance of three demons to defend the claim, and yet, that is precisely what happens. Mephistopheles shows back up with Lucifer and Beelzebub. Lucifer, arch-deceiver, lies to Faustus saying that he is the only one who has interest in his soul. Falling back on his image of a just Christ who would not rob from hell, Lucifer betrays his own concern for his purchase. While the Old Law might have given him sole interest in Faustus's soul as a mortal and sinning man, Christ's sacrifice and free will keep Faustus's soul in his own possession throughout his life.

Even in the final act of the play, Faustus maintains his likeness to Christ in his agony in the face of entering hell. In the final act, he emphasizes the militaristic conflict he experiences internally:

I do repent, and yet I do despair.
Hell strives with grace for conquest in my breast. (V.i.63-64)

Tellingly, Mephistopheles is still threatened by the possibility of Faustus's salvation and threatens to tear his flesh in pieces. The ending of the play reveals the post-Reformation, emotional and psychological need for a view of a God who intervenes in the existence of humans even after death by dramatizing Faustus's very definite fear of hell. But Marlowe's play does not provide a conclusive victory for Satan. Faustus says,

Yet for Christ's sake, whose blood hath ransomed me,
Impose some end to my incessant pain.
Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,
A hundred thousand, and at last be saved! (V.ii.97-100)

These lines rest fervently on the hope that Jesus's argument with Satan in hell was in earnest. Faustus desperately wants it to be true that he "did not hold out hell to them forever," and it seems that he retains some faith that it is so since he refers to Christ's blood as that which has "ransomed" him in the past tense.

Reading *Doctor Faustus* as a reimagining of the Harrowing of Hell tradition reclaims Faustus as a tragic hero with whom we can identify. Though he begins the play wanting to be like Christ and defeat supernatural powers on his own terms—a sin for which the Chorus condemns him, Faustus shifts his focus to relying on Christ's ability to harrow hell. He maintains this focus throughout the remainder of the play, even amidst the worldly distractions of joking, eating, and sex. In attempting to renegotiate the terms of damnation or salvation, Faustus proves that he has not given up his free will, nor has he given up on the idea that humans have some agency in dealing with demons and supernatural powers.

Faustus's use of the law to combat supernatural forces and redeem himself provides early modern subjects with a model of appropriating agency through the law. Our understanding of witchcraft and magic in the period is enhanced by viewing this quintessential witch play through the lens of the Harrowing. The Harrowing model is empowering for subjects and needs to be considered when we consider the 'self-fashioning of witches' Dianne Purkiss describes. Faustus's practice of magic in the strictest English sense—contracting with and spending time with the devil—is an important focal point because it provides a model of supernatural agency for the general

populace. Faustus's magic is infinitely emulable—it is not inherited or even learned through study—despite the continual reference to study and books. This means that his actions can be reproduced by subjects in any social position. The work begun by Bevington, Guenther, and McAdam quite rightly emphasizes the interrelationship between magic, religion, and theater in the Renaissance, and while each reading of Faustus offers something different to my understanding of Renaissance culture, they all take seriously the play's insistent problem with dominant Protestant, especially Calvinist, culture's lack of assurance for salvation of believers. Guenther argues:

In *Doctor Faustus*, then, Protestant anxiety about salvation and popular desire for entertainment converged to produce historically contingent aesthetic effects. Marlowe brilliantly exploited the reformist understanding of magic as at once theatrical spectacle and theological instrument in order to produce an *aesthetic* instrumentality, in which onstage performativity – the staging of conjuration – generated effects that offstage conjuration quite obviously could not.²⁰¹

Guenther points out that all audience members would have seen themselves as possibly complicit in the conjuration of devils that occurs on the stage. Whether this complicity is greeted by excitement or repulsion, it induces anxiety for audience members. These interpretations show that Renaissance culture did not encourage theater-goers to separate the artistic representations in front of them from their religious and personal views; instead, the artistic representations on the stage contributed to and were revised by the theological assumptions delivered by sermons and disseminated in pamphlets. The

²⁰¹ Guenther, *Magical Imaginations*, 65, 84.

Harrowing of Hell lens provides a provocative way of viewing the discourses of religion and magic as interrelated in the production of early modern culture.

Doctor Faustus models the appropriation of agency available to early modern subjects through contracts and contract law. Subha Mukherji points out that the “theatre-as-court metaphor is pervasive in Renaissance drama” and argues that Marlowe and others “repeatedly open up the action of their plays, explicitly or implicitly, to the judgement, even ‘sentence’, of the theatre audience.”²⁰² While I agree that playwrights appropriated the stage as a location for playing out legal drama so that the audience could participate by judging characters and events, I also see the relationship between the law and the stage as a place of constructing and revising the notions of the self and agency in and under the law. Thus, in addition to judging the actions of characters, audience members learned how to create and participate in contractual agreements and debates over contractual agreements from watching characters do so on stage. Ellen MacKay has suggested that there is a complex relationship between seeing and doing on the medieval and early modern stage. She writes, “The infectiousness of the medieval stage is yet another manifestation of performance’s ability to breach the remove of the spectator by undermining the ‘indifferancy’ of looking on with such violence as to put to the question the fundamental opposition between seeing and doing.”²⁰³ MacKay notes that the early modern stage could induce fervor to the same extent that any medieval play could and that the methods through which this was done differ little between the two periods. She

²⁰² Subha Mukherji, *Law and Representation in Early Modern Drama*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1.

²⁰³ Ellen MacKay, *Persecution, Plague, and Fire: Fugitive Histories of the Stage in Early Modern England*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011), 106.

goes so far as to suggest that appropriate analysis of theater “makes a chimera out of our Reformation.”²⁰⁴ Viewing Faustus on the stage in the late sixteenth century could then have very similar effects to viewing the Harrowing in the late fifteenth century. If seeing Christ combat Satan with rhetorical flourish could inspire the confidence that any subject might be able to argue and negotiate for his own salvation, perhaps seeing Faustus do the same with Mephistopheles gave early modern believers a modicum of hope that they could play a role in their own redemption by performing in their own spiritual battles. Thus, though the subject matter changes drastically between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the potentiality of affective piety discussed in the first chapter is equally valid for subject construction through viewing characters on the early modern stage as it was for inserting oneself into the narrative of Christ’s life.

In the previous chapter we looked at Spenser’s anxiety over the Harrowing tradition and the implications it has for understanding and embodying Protestant contemplation. Marlowe enters into this conversation without the same kind of anxiety and seizes the supernatural agency Spenser found so troubling in order to stage resistance to any loss of personal power. The figures of Archimago, Night, Mephistopheles, and Faustus are given similar identifying marks—witches’ marks one might say—but, the success that Archimago and Night experience as a result of their harrowing is far more troubling than the possibility of Faustus’s success. If the A-text leaves the possibility for redemption open, the audience can only celebrate Faustus’s triumph over the underhanded machinations of Lucifer and Mephistopheles. Faustus’ actions are far more

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 136.

emulable as well—divorcing the scholar from his books and making him a figure of Christ disperses the model for agency to a far greater degree. Hotspur implies that while it may take some special magic to summon the devil, defeating him relies on an ability any man can display: that of speaking truth. Marlowe adds that how the words are spoken, how one can negotiate his social position can also add power to the spiritual battle. In this more positive representation, the emphasis on dealing with the devil not through avoidance or prayer or intercession but through straightforward reliance on truthful words is an important aspect of demonology and magic in the Renaissance that has been hitherto unexplored in the criticism of the early modern literature that depicts magic and making deals with demonic powers. In the next two chapters I discuss William Shakespeare's and Margaret Cavendish's reinterpretations of the Harrowing. William Shakespeare, unlike Spenser, shows a great deal less anxiety with the idea of supernatural agency and negotiating with demons. Building on the work of Spenser and Marlowe, Shakespeare and Cavendish enlarge the scope and audience to an even greater degree by creating female Christ-figures who harrow the hells of political instability in their own world.

CHAPTER V

“LADY MARGERIE, YOUR MIDWIFE THERE”: PAULINA SAVES THE BASTARD (AND EVERYONE ELSE)

Atheisme can sprout and spreade abroad fast inough of it selfe, (as lamentable experience dayly teacheth,) though it have no favorites or abettors to promote and propagate it: & therefore either to plante by writing, or to water by speaking the cursed rootes & seedes thereof, is neither the part of a Paule, nor of an Apollo.
—Richard Parkes, *A Briefe Answer Vnto Certaine Objections*²⁰⁵

Richard Parkes, a Church of England clergyman and a contemporary of William Shakespeare, reopened the debate about Christ’s descent into hell in the early years of the seventeenth century when he published *A briefe answer unto certaine objections and reasons against the descension of Christ into hell* (1604) as a response to Willet’s argument, following Calvin, that the scriptural references to a descent refer to Christ’s feeling the pains of hell on the cross before his death.²⁰⁶ I discuss the relevance of this portion of the continuing debate in the first section of this chapter, but I begin by pointing out a few notable things about Parkes’ argument that are especially prescient of *The*

²⁰⁵ Richard Parkes, *A Briefe Ansvvere Vnto Certaine Obiections and Reasons against the Descension of Christ into Hell Lately Sent in Writing Vnto a Gentleman in the Countrey*. Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 1111:02. At Oxford : Printed by Ioseph Barnes, and are to be sold in Paules Church-yard at the signe of the Crowne, by Simon VVaterson (London), 1604, A2v.

²⁰⁶ Dewey D. Wallace, “Parkes, Richard (b. 1558/9).” Dewey D. Wallace, jun. In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., edited by Lawrence Goldman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, . <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21358> (accessed November 2, 2013). Wallace notes that the debate between Parkes and Willet eventually focused on the existence of purgatory, a place both authors denied. As with the other contributions to the debate, I maintain a focus on the character and agency of Christ throughout my readings of these pamphlets.

Winter's Tale. Parkes brings together two traditions to combat what he terms atheism in this brief reference. One way of reading this might be to see Paul, the founder of the Church and the disciple of Christ, as a stand in for the entirety of Christian tradition and the doctrines passed down from the forefathers of the Church. Apollo, the Greek god of prophecy and the arts, on the other hand, could represent pre-Christian wisdom and the understanding intuited through study and enjoyment of the arts. These references suggest an argument against an iconoclastic view that makes all images into objects of idolatry that lead away from true faith. Also implicit in his brief references is the argument that the study of the ancients and the poetry inspired by that study is not the danger to unified religious belief. Instead it is questioning of doctrines and reliance upon reason that poses the threat to England's religious harmony. In the case of Christ's descent into hell, to deny the story or the image is to plant the seeds of atheism. These are arguments that Shakespeare, as a poet and playwright, would have found both comforting and compelling. In this chapter, I argue that Shakespeare takes up the arguments of Parkes and other pro-descent theologians by feminizing the figures of Paul and Apollo in the character of Paulina in *The Winter's Tale*.

First performed in 1610, *The Winter's Tale* centers on the issues of forgiveness and faith, and therefore also on their opposites, judgment and atheism. Here, by the use of the term "atheism," I suggest not that atheism was a system of belief or non-belief in the early modern period, but that Parkes and Shakespeare purposefully conflate the Puritan, iconoclastic tendency to deny the descent with questioning faith and thereby with the conclusion that the one God did not exist. Thus, by "atheism," I mean the end result of

relying on reason and questioning the miraculous. Peter Harrison argues, “In its most innocuous form, worldly learning had the potential to seduce the curious mind away from the knowledge of God... The end result of this tendency was that the learned might even be persuaded that God did not exist.”²⁰⁷ Parkes and Shakespeare use the contours of this argument to fit their own agendas. Worldly learning becomes the search for evidence and proof, while the knowledge of God is the intuited *emotional* response to the spiritual experience of watching this re-interpretation of the third Article of Faith. The importance of Leontes’s journey is that he, like the audience, must move from the one pole to the other. After destroying his family line through a fit of jealousy, King Leontes of Sicilia (and to a lesser extent King Polixenes of Bohemia) must fight his way back from relying on his own mind, empirical knowledge, and visual or ocular proof—in essence, from atheism, in order to restore peace and longevity to both Sicilia and the nearby kingdom of Bohemia. Leontes cannot rid himself of his madness or possible possession on his own, a fact made clear by his violent response to the Oracle’s clearing Queen Hermione of all charges of adultery or treason. It becomes necessary for Paulina to intercede on Leontes and Hermione’s behalf in order to rid the court of the evil of pride and heresy. Paulina, often discussed as a variant of Paul, is the type of Christ who can rid Shakespeare’s

²⁰⁷ Peter Harrison, “Curiosity, Forbidden Knowledge, and the Reformation of Natural Philosophy in Early Modern England.” *Isis* 92, no. 2 (2001): 265-290. For more information about atheism in Renaissance literature, see George T. Buckley, *Atheism in the English Renaissance*. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965) and Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993). Atheism is often described as skepticism in the period because that was more socially acceptable and less politically dangerous.

Sicilia from the evils presented by tyrannical, patriarchal rule.²⁰⁸ Parkes insists that neither a Paul nor an Apollo would spread or support atheism, and Shakespeare's tragedy suggests that *only* the magic of a Paulina can reawaken Leontes' faith and redeem him through the restoration of his family line and the reanimation of his wife.

In the previous two chapters, I argued that early modern writers re-envision the Harrowing of Hell by creating Christ-figures who battle supernatural evil by modeling their behavior on Christ's confrontation with Satan. Faustus can be profitably viewed as a Christ-figure who uses juridical rhetoric to stymie the forces of evil in the form of Mephistopheles and Lucifer. Though Spenser multiplies his harrowings to question the morality of Christ's descent, both Archimago and Night are successful at bringing spirits out of hell. Spenser, Marlowe, and the sixteenth-century theologians who debate the descent discuss the broader issues of the location of hell, who or what might be brought in or out from hell, the relationship between cosmic law and worldly law, and the control an individual has over his or her spirit. In their retellings of the harrowing, Spenser and Marlowe seem to be concerned primarily with the subject's agency over his or her fate in the afterlife. Though the arguments presented in these texts have great implications for the subject's participation in this world, their primary focus is on the actions possible in

²⁰⁸ Paulina's association with Paul is long-lived and much debated. For example, in 1955, J. A. Bryant argued that Paulina was a functional St. Paul: "Fortunately, Leontes has a St. Paul to help him to that point of understanding; for this is precisely the function of Shakespeare's Paulina, who has no counterpart in Greene's narrative" (217) in "Shakespeare's Allegory: The Winter's Tale." *The Sewanee Review* 63, no. 2 (1955): 202-222. In 1971, Larry S. Champion called Bryant's view "the extreme archetypal view" (435) in "The Perspective of Comedy: Shakespeare's the Winter's Tale." *College English* 32, no. 4 (1971): 428-438 & 443-447. Rather than viewing the play as allegorical, I view the intermixing of Christian and Classical references as a fruitful place for Shakespeare to comment on current religious controversies. I argue below that Paulina's association with Paul is complicated by Shakespeare's undercutting of her miracle. The association with both miracle and trickery is appropriate for a figure of the Harrowing Christ, however.

heaven or hell. In this chapter, I turn toward re-imaginings of the harrowing that empower subjects to solve political problems in this world. Here I argue that Paulina is a Christ-figure who harrows the hell of the court under a tyrant in order to redeem the soul of the monarch *and* his line for the benefit of the entire kingdom. Faustus was a surprising Christ-figure because negotiating with the devil was widely affiliated with witchcraft. Paulina is also a surprising Christ-figure because of her gender and because her rebelliousness against the king.

Critics have associated the final scenes in *The Winter's Tale* with biblical resurrection scenes but not with the Harrowing of Hell. Hermione may be more easily seen as a figure of Christ because of her passion, trial, death, and resurrection. Walter Lim has argued, "The animation of Hermione's statue...finds its informing source not only in the mythic account of Ovid's perennially popular Pygmalion, but also in the stories of resurrection afforded by Scripture."²⁰⁹ Lim draws the connection between Shakespeare's play and II Kings, noting that even the bear can be found in the Bible. Elizabeth Williamson contends that the connection between Hermione's resurrection and Christ's resurrection in the cycle dramas is evidence that we should not overestimate the Reformation's injunctions against staging religious matters: "The fact that the New Testament provided the source material for both medieval and early modern resurrections indicates the limitations of reading play-scripts as either sacred or secular based on their

²⁰⁹ Walter S. H. Lim, "Knowledge and Belief in 'The Winter's Tale'." *Studies in English Literature* 41, no. 2 (2001): 317-344, 317.

chronological proximity to the Reformation.”²¹⁰ My reading of *The Winter’s Tale* adds to this scholarship by focusing in on Christ’s apocryphal descent into hell and the implications that has for the early modern sense of agency over spiritual matters. Focusing on Paulina as the figure of Christ rather than Hermione makes it possible to see the emphasis on female agency in the play. Because we frequently read Hermione as an object of idolatry or of spiritual renewal that enables Leontes’s salvation, we inadvertently neglect Paulina’s tremendous force throughout the play.²¹¹ Her works are the motivating force for the vast majority of the plot. She rescues Perdita from the dungeon, either hides or preserves Hermione after her trial and death, keeps Leontes from remarrying, and unites the family again at the end. It is through Paulina’s actions that the king’s mental health and his line are restored.

We cannot read Paulina as Christ without noting that she is indeed a female character. Feminizing the trinity was not a wholly new idea in the early modern period. As Carline Walker Bynum argues,

Descriptions of God as a woman nursing the soul at her breasts, drying its tears, punishing its petty mischief-making, giving birth to it in agony and travail, are part of a growing tendency to speak of the divine in homey images and to emphasize its approachability...Seeing Christ or God or the Holy Spirit as female

²¹⁰ Elizabeth Williamson, “Things Newly Performed: The Resurrection Tradition in Shakespeare’s Plays” in *Shakespeare and Religious Change*. Eds. Kenneth J. E. Graham and Philip D. Collington (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 121.

²¹¹ Examples of articles that ignore Paulina’s contribution to Sicilian renewal are too numerous to list, but a few recent discussions of renewal and rejuvenation in *The Winter’s Tale* that do not mention Paulina include, Maurice Hunt who refers to the rejuvenation as “Apollo’s divine comedy” in “‘Bearing Hence’ Shakespeare’s ‘The Winter’s Tale.’” *Studies in English Literature* 44, no. 2 (2004): 333-346, Catherine E. Winiarski, “Adultery, Idolatry, and the Subject of Monotheism.” *Religion & Literature* 38, no. 3 (2006): 41-63, and F. Elizabeth Hart, “‘Great is Diana’ of Shakespeare’s Ephesus.” *Studies in English Literature* 43, no. 2 (2003): 347-374. Knapp and Lim also consider Hermione’s statue as important independent of Paulina’s reanimation of it.

is thus part of a later medieval devotional tradition that is characterized by increasing preference for analogies taken from human relationships.²¹²

God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or all three could be seen as female, even as nursing mothers in the mysticism of the High Middle Ages, but it would not be fair to say that this image is ever dominant or widely-accepted in the period. Certainly it was not the case that a womanly Jesus was prominent in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. However, the Harrowing of Hell casts Christ as the deliverer of souls in a way that can be profitably connected to birthing or midwifery. Furthermore, the Harrowing combines this understanding of Christ as lifting the righteous out of the womb of the earth with a confrontational Christ who combats evil through words. As was discussed in the third chapter, in order to make the Harrowing Christ a distinctly English hero, Adam Hill published his pamphlet with an image of Jesus standing on a dragon. In that chapter, I argued that the dragon connects the patriotic activities of St. George with the Harrowing of Hell. In this chapter, I offer the female version of St. George, St. Margaret of Antioch, as a Harrowing image. St. Margaret is reminiscent of Christ's descent into hell because she also confronts and defeats Satan in the form of a dragon and she is the patron saint of childbirth. Thus, Paulina, the midwife, is promoted from earthly counselor to Christ-like rescuer of souls and lineage through her connection with St. Margaret of Antioch in this play.

The Winter's Tale has been recently read for its contributions to our understanding of nursing, midwifery, and motherhood in the early modern period. Unlike

²¹² Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 129-130.

the great many Shakespeare plays where mothers are completely absent and childhood is ancillary at best, *The Winter's Tale* features a birth as a central plot point, two family deaths (one of a male child named Mamillius, or breast) as its climax, and a daughter's reunion with her mother as the resolution. Gail Kern Paster argues that the play explains the psychological trauma of being removed from the breast: "Leontes' memory of his own early displacement from the maternal body, activated by the little boy's imminent displacement from his exclusive relation to his mother and by the semiotic links to the breast in the little boy's name."²¹³ Paster suggests that the trauma associated with weaning fuels both Leontes's madness and the culture of shame surrounding this maternal function. Susan Snyder proposes the loss of breast milk as the cause of Mamillius's death: "Though past weaning, Mamillius in his vulnerable 'sappy' childhood still participates in the feminine in some somatic way and needs female nurture."²¹⁴ Viewing the breast and nursing as central to the play is another way of approaching the female agents in the play that refrains from further objectifying them. Perhaps most broadly, Kirstie Gulick Rosenfield claims that the play "subtly manipulates the cultural and ideological constructions that underlie witchcraft belief" in order to "identif[y] female vocality, sexuality, maternity, and midwifery with the witch and [reveal] those associations as accusations designed to contain the threat of the transgressing woman."²¹⁵ Caroline Bicks also points out that the association with the midwife and the witch related

²¹³ Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*. (Cornell University Press, 1993), 265.

²¹⁴ Susan Snyder, "Mamillius and Gender Polarization in the Winter's Tale." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (1999), 4.

²¹⁵ Kirstie Gulick Rosenfield, "Nursing nothing: Witchcraft and female sexuality in The Winter's Tale." *Mosaic* 35, no. 1 (2002), 95.

to the defining of patrilineage specifically in *The Winter's Tale*.²¹⁶ Implicit in these arguments, then, is that Shakespeare in some way uses *The Winter's Tale* to defend woman's power and importance. Looking at Paulina as a Harrowing Christ-figure extends this line of reasoning and asks what these conversations have to offer the study of religious presentation in the play. Since midwifery is an element of natural philosophy and therefore the emerging scientific discourse, reading Paulina as both Christ-figure and midwife provides an example of these overlapping and mutually constitutive discourses. Paulina's harrowing of Sicilia works to restore the child that the mother loses by weaning through her descent into a political hell and ascension with the lives of Perdita and Hermione. Her role as midwife has both literal or earthly connotations and spiritual ones because her restoration of the family line simultaneously restores faith in the image that heals Leontes of his iconoclasm.

A major issue of contention in recent criticism of *The Winter's Tale* deals with iconoclasm and its route to atheism. Some scholars focus on Leontes's iconoclasm as a modernizing tendency. James Knapp argues that the play focuses on the importance of Leontes's redeemed ethical decision-making over miracle or magic: "The fact that [Leontes] makes a choice constitutes the ethical nature of his character *contra* indeterminacy, against endless deferral. It is in this choice that he asserts his responsibility and enables his future redemption."²¹⁷ Knapp's argument is representative of those that focus on Leontes's response to the art of the statue as representative of

²¹⁶ Caroline Bicks, *Midwiving Subjects in Shakespeare's England* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003).

²¹⁷ James A. Knapp, "Visual and Ethical Truth in 'The Winter's Tale'." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2004): 253-278, 253.

iconography and religious art in general. The ending of the play then redeems the Catholic focus on images and artwork without enacting miracle by valuing a secular or symbolic way of looking at the image. In essence, it redeems art without redeeming religion. Lim passes secularization and continues to a denial of religion when he concludes that Shakespeare's position is one of deep skepticism:

By not permitting faith and theological dogma the final say on what the ultimate significance of the highly provocative enlivening of Hermione's statue may be, *The Winter's Tale* interrogates the very ground on which claims of access to definite knowledge and transcendent truth are built...it may be that the foundation of our sure knowledge is perhaps nothing more than ignorant or fond credulity.²¹⁸

Lim's argument is that because the possibility that Hermione has been alive for the sixteen-year interim is left open in the play, readers should conclude that Shakespeare valorizes the skeptic over the superstitious subject, but this argument fails to take into account the tone of the play's conclusion, one filled with hope for the future and gratitude for forgiveness and new possibilities. Reading this play in the context of the debates about Christ's descent into hell shows that Shakespeare does in fact allow "faith and theological dogma" to have "the final say" in the play.

Understanding Paulina as a figure of Christ in a harrowing narrative substantively shifts our understanding of the ongoing debate between faith and knowledge in the criticism of the play. It becomes clear that Shakespeare's position on the controversy is overwhelmingly on the side of faith and magic rather than knowledge and questioning. When Paulina famously tells Leontes that "It is required you do awake your faith" in the

²¹⁸ Lim, "Knowledge and Belief," 331.

final scene of the play, a great many important elements hinge on this ability (V.3.94-95). Faith, first of all, is required for his full redemption: he must believe to be saved. But Leontes' faith as orchestrated through the actions of Paulina is also necessary for Hermione's rebirth and Sicilia's continued governance in the form of Perdita. Faith in the play is thus seen as integral to saving both Sicilia's royal lineage and the product of its own lineage of wisdom and doctrines passed down from the church fathers through the Catholic faith. Phebe Jensen argues, "Though *The Winter's Tale* is not a Catholic play, an exploration of its relationship to contemporary debates about festivity confirms that it defends the Catholic faith on aesthetic grounds, advocating an anti-iconoclastic aesthetics of 'real presence' for the theater and a festive world for early modern England."²¹⁹ Following, Jensen, I argue that Shakespeare portrays faith and the connection to religious heritage as an active and righteous choice in this play; in essence it becomes its own form of agency. This view of faith and ritual action allows a reading of Paulina's magic as productive of Leontes's repentance and Hermione's resurrection. I read both Leontes and Paulina as engaged in a struggle for moral action performed through ritual and magic. Their struggle and success becomes a model for the audience's working through of guilt, failure, and tragedy.

In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare reconfigures the elements of the Harrowing narrative in order to create a female Christ-figure who is a rebel under an unjust king. In the first section of this chapter, I return again to the theological debates over the third

²¹⁹ Phebe Jensen, "Singing Psalms to Horn-Pipes: Festivity, Iconoclasm, and Catholicism in 'The Winter's Tale'." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55.3 (2004): 282.

Article of Faith concerning Christ's descent into hell to show the emphasis on family metaphors and the importance of faith in these arguments. I then turn to Paulina's promotion to Christ-figure through the connection with St. Margaret of Antioch and the powers of the midwife in the play. Because Sicilia is not literally hell in this play, I spend the next section explaining the similarities Shakespeare draws between tyrannical kings and fallen angels and the court and the torturous punishments of hell. The final two sections detail Paulina's harrowing actions by looking at this play's "porter scene" taken from the Middle English Harrowing cycles and Paulina's possible trickery concerning Hermione's return as productive of faith and repentance.

The Lineage of Faith

The use of the term "early modern" suggests that we recognize in Tudor and Stuart England a tendency to value reason and intellect over what some might call the more simple values of faith and superstition. Texts of the early seventeenth century, however, indicate that many early modern subjects would have to drastically change their philosophical understandings before faith and superstition were discredited as modes of accessing the world. In the introduction, I discussed how Martin Luther expressly proscribes the intense questioning of Christ's descent into hell, enjoining believers to remember and think on the image and the simple story to access "the true core and meaning" of the descent.²²⁰ As we have seen in the second and third chapters, English

²²⁰ Martin Luther, "Martin Luther's Torgau Sermon on Christ's Descent into Hell and the Resurrection," Trans. Robert Kolb, 2001, 247.

theologians like Hugh Broughton, Thomas Bilson, Christopher Carlile, and Adam Hill in no way refrained from questioning the details of Christ's descent. Broughton and Carlile question the translation of the words and the compatibility of the descent doctrine with the Protestant doctrine of predestination, and even though Bilson and Hill argue that Christ did descend into hell at least with his soul, they are obviously much more concerned with "sublime ideas" like what constitutes death and resurrection than Luther would like for them to be.²²¹ The early seventeenth-century theological debates over Christ's descent show that the Church of England encouraged believers to accept faith rather than question it. Parkes and John Higin categorize the questioning of this doctrine as heresy and the road to atheism, and their rhetoric emphasizes the need for good Anglicans to use faith as a shield against the attack on the Articles of Faith. The tendency to associate questioning and logic with atheism is especially clear in the pamphlets written by John Higin, Parkes, and Andrew Willet. In these texts, the prominent thematic issues of *The Winter's Tale*—knowledge versus faith and parentage and family relations—are seen to be closely related to the doctrine of Christ's descent. Shakespeare's tragi-comedy impinges upon this debate by recasting the primary characters of Leontes, Paulina, and Hermione into roles that structurally re-present the key concepts (Calvinistic iconoclasm, active moderation, Catholicism) and bring those concepts to life in a compelling reimagining of the Harrowing. Though Higin and Parkes argue that Christ did descend into hell as it says in the articles of faith and Willet argues that he did not, the

²²¹ Luther's Torgau Sermon states, "We should be hesitant about formulating sublime and inexplicable ideas" (247).

debates point to the interrelationship of the themes of Christ's descent; knowledge, faith, and superstition; and maternity and paternity.

Before explaining how these early texts deal with the themes of faith and lineage, it is necessary to outline briefly the contours of the debate. The broader context centers on the Hampton Court Conference of 1604 in which James I met with leading English Puritans in order to discuss doctrine. The Puritans wanted a clearer confirmation of the doctrine of predestination and permission to modify their interpretations of the Thirty-nine Articles based on unconditional predestination. Peter White explains that "James at once declared his 'utter dislike' of [the unconditional predestination] doctrine" and insisted on the necessity of repentance.²²² The end result of the conference was James's insistence that all ministers adhere to the Thirty-nine Articles in their sermons. Parkes, a Church of England moderate, and Willet, a clergyman with Calvinist-leanings, engaged in a published debate only after Parkes responded to Willet's unpublished paper denying a literal descent into hell. It becomes clear by the early seventeenth century that the debate is no longer as much about translation errors as it is about doctrinal leanings. Puritans and Calvinists are less inclined to argue for Christ's literal descent, and moderate Protestants are more likely to insist that Christ descended in spirit and proved his supremacy over the devil. Parkes accused Willet of Puritanism and heresy, while Willet's response, initially addressed to Parliament, derides Parkes attempt to make such divisions amongst English Protestants. Willet, a prolific and prominent Church of England

²²² Peter White, *Predestination, policy and polemic: Conflict and consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War*. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 146-147.

clergyman, wrote consistently throughout his life of the dangers of reintroducing popish doctrines into the Reformed Church. Though he avoided the accusations of Puritanism leveled at him by Parkes, he appealed to James I to maintain the staunchly Protestant basis for the Anglican Church and avoid the encroaching moderate view point represented by Parkes and other theologians like Richard Hooker. He has been described as an “unimpeachable source for the Church of England’s doctrinal Calvinism.”²²³ John Higgins is better known as a poet, linguist, and controversialist than he is as a theologian; however, his *An Answer to Master William Perkins Concerning Christ’s Descension into Hell* (1602) was his last published work, and it responds point for point to William Perkins who was a prominent Church of England clergyman, also with Calvinist leanings.²²⁴ I choose these texts as representative of the debate just before Shakespeare’s composition of *The Winter’s Tale* and because of their family metaphors, references to antiquity, and association of atheism with questioning and knowledge.

The debate over Christ’s descent in the early seventeenth century maintains its focus on the law’s reliance on a unified Church with unified beliefs and the necessity of differentiating the Church of England from both the Catholics and the Puritans, but it turns away from allowing various interpretations of words or scripture. Parkes complains that if everyone can interpret scripture him or herself, linguistic chaos would ensue:

²²³ Anthony Milton, “Willet, Andrew (1561/2–1621).” Anthony Milton In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Online ed., edited by Lawrence Goldman, January 2008. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29445> (accessed November 7, 2013).

²²⁴ Philip Schwyzer, “Higgins, John (b. c. 1544, d. in or before 1620).” Philip Schwyzer In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Online ed., edited by Lawrence Goldman, May 2010. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13233> (accessed November 7, 2013).

Wee may deprave & corrupte, all, even the most notable places of Scripture, if it shall be lawfull for every one to forge and frame new figurative significations of words at his pleasure. (B3v)²²⁵

Parkes's suggestion that it should be unlawful for individuals to allegorize words in scripture hearkens back to the concern that if we make one part of scripture a metaphor, suddenly all parts may become metaphorical and the crucifixion itself may be viewed as standing in for something else. It comes as no surprise then that the language is so strong, that the wrong interpretation can "deprave and corrupt" the faith of the people. He characterizes the Puritan desire to reinterpret the doctrine as a whim, something done at one's "pleasure," but the effects are quite dangerous and must have grave, even legal, consequences. Just as in the works of Christopher Carlile, Adam Hill, and Alexander Hume, we see doctrine and its interpretation as central to the stability of language and meaning, and language and meaning as central to the order of society as a whole. Parkes supports the idea that interpretation should be controlled by law, an idea that is taken up by James I in his commission of a new authorized bible.

Thus arguing that Christ did not descend into hell, or that the descent is a metaphorical explanation for the pains Christ suffered on the cross, was an affront to the portion of the Church of England that considered the Articles of Faith to be the literal and catholic (universal) decree of their beliefs. Those on the more Calvinist side of the spectrum insist that literal or metaphorical interpretations of the Articles are not nearly as important as maintaining the break from Rome. These polarizations are often described

²²⁵ Parkes, *A Briefe Answer vnto Certaine Obiections and Reasons against the Descension of Christ into Hell Lately Sent in Writing Vnto a Gentleman in the Countrey*, 1604.

as a battlefield. For example, Willet counters that the concern over how Protestants interpret scripture is not nearly as important as working against the Catholics who are deluging England with print:

It had bin much more commendable, if the Answerer had bent his force against the common adversaire. There are lately diuers Popish books come ouer, which might have set him on work: what profit can it bee to him, the field being pitched against the Papists, to pick quarrels with his fellow souldiers? (B2r-B2v)²²⁶

Willet implies that differing interpretations of doctrine are not nearly as dangerous as a relapse into Catholicism, showing his primary concern to be differentiation from the superstition of the Catholic faith over unity in the Church of England. His description relies on militaristic metaphors. The moderate and extreme Protestants should be working together against a “common adversary,” or the Catholic Church that Willet figures as Satan. Paradoxically emphasizing the importance of these texts and print in general, Willet suggests that books are the ammunition the factions fling at each other and that Parkes should be flinging his pamphlet toward the “Popish” people rather than creating further division between his own soldiers on this great battlefield. By the middle of the seventeenth-century, however, the battlefield Willet describes is pitched not against the Catholics but against the Republican Puritans.

²²⁶ Andrew Willet, *Limbo-Mastix: That Is, a Canuise of Limbus Patrum Shewing by Euident Places of Scripture, Inuincible Reasons, and Pregnant Testimonies of Some Ancient Writers, That Christ Descended Not in Soule to Hell, to Deliuer the Fathers from Thence. Containing Also a Briefe Replie to So Much of a Pamphlet Lately Published, Intituled, an Answer to Certaine Obiections against the Descension &C. As Lookes That Way, and Is Personally Directed against Some Writers of Our Church*. Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 1050:03. London : Printed [by Felix Kingston] for Thomas Man, 1604., 1604.

There was, of course, no way to predict that civil wars would come of doctrinal differences, and the doctrine of the descent was only one small part of the larger controversies that caused the rift between the Royalists and the Republicans, but it is important to note that we can see in the debates over the descent the beginnings of this inter-Church of England controversy. These conflicts between English Protestants were figured as divisions between family members. Thus, in addition to the (less frequent) references to the Catholics as “papists” and the importance of having a unified church, the early seventeenth-century pamphlets show a reliance on parenting/mothering as a metaphor for propagating religion and an emphasis on faith over knowledge. Willet’s response to Parkes emphasizes the nursing mother as dangerous and the nurse as an excellent alternative.

We cannot but reioyce to heare of your Honors Christian consultation for the propagating of the Gospell, in planting every where of good pastors, that the people may be brought from the darknesse of their ignorance to the light of knowledge: that they be no longer children in understanding, and as babes and sucklings in religion. Ambrose herein thus pleasantly / alludeth upon these words, *Woe to them that give sucke: Let us make haste to weane our little ones: when Isaac was weaned, Abraham made a feast, the child not weaned was in the night by the drowsie mother overlaid.* Your Honors then do right well to provide good nurses, to weane the people from their ignorance, that hey be no longer overlaid with drowsie and negligent pastors: and that such bee not excluded from nursing, which haue store of milke in the breasts, and seeke in peace and a good conscience to nourish the people of God (A3r – A3v).²²⁷

Here Willet questions the received doctrines of the Catholic Church with its own text:

Ambrose. St. Ambrose was a fourth century church father with a “reputation for

²²⁷ Andrew Willet, *Limbo-Mastix*, 1604.

misogyny” due to his “almost perverse willingness to discover criticism of women just where others were to find them vindicated.”²²⁸ Willet’s appropriation and expansion of Ambrose’s mandate that fathers should rejoice at removing children from their mothers’ influence has many unusual implications within the early modern debate. Most simply, the reference allows Willet to draw on the wisdom and credibility of a church father while simultaneously characterizing the doctrine as coming from a thoughtless mother who might roll on top of her infant in the night. He characterizes his audience, Parliament, as the stewards or governors of innocent, untutored children who need to be taken away from their Catholic infancy. The governors must take responsibility for guarding the public to the correct interpretation of theological issues. Interestingly these stewards of England’s religion are also their political stewards, Parliament. The hierarchy, Willet suggests, benefits from its consistency. Unlike in the Catholic Church, led by the pope, the Parliament in England is responsible for guiding both religious and secular activities and can therefore provide continuity of parental leadership.

Willet’s argument through the metaphor of wet-nursing, divorced from its medieval, Catholic context, is highly unusual in Renaissance England. Though wealthy merchants and aristocrats utilized wet-nurses widely in the seventeenth century, most Church and state authorities argued that the best care for an infant is from its own mother. Michelle Dowd notes, “The institution of wet-nursing was subject to intense moral and religious debate during this period, and opposition to it came from several fronts: from

²²⁸ Alcuin Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 59-60.

Protestant theologians, from medical practitioners, and from aristocratic women.”²²⁹ Thus for Willet to suggest that Parliament can thus save the children of England by taking them from their careless nursing mother and giving them to a knowledgeable, lactating, and unrelated nurse is an unusual choice of metaphor. Even if Willet views both the “drowsy and negligent pastors” and those with a “store of milk in the breasts” as wet-nurses, the implication that Parliament should take the children of England away from their parents and put them with unrelated women may have read as at least foolhardy if not unpatriotic to contemporary audiences. It is perhaps for this reason that Parkes describes the error of relying on ancient “wisdom” as “overweening”:

Wherefore I cannot but greatly marveile, that any professed Christians should now, after many daies of salvation, & yeares of grace, become (as it were) prophane Anaxagoristes; making it a matter disputable, whether the snow be white, or no. For according to the assurance of faith, it is no lesse impious in Divinity amonst Christians to doubte of Christs descension into hell; then absurd in philosophie amonge naturalistes to deny the whitenes of snowe. But such is the blinded affection of overweening selfe-loue, (the mother and nourse of pride & singularity;) that diverse otherwise learned and zealous, preferring the deceitfull apprehension of humane witte and reason before the infallible direction of divine knowledge and pietie, become inventours of noveltye, where the shoulde bee followers of antiquitye, and maisters of errour, where they should be scoliers of the truth (A2v)²³⁰

In his own evaluation of early sources, Parkes draws on the heretical notions of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, a fifth-century Greek philosopher who argued that because snow was frozen water and water is black, snow too must be black. Anaxagoras’s

²²⁹ Michelle Dowd, *Women’s Work in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*. (New York: Pgrave Macmillan, 2009), 71-72.

²³⁰ Parkes, *A Briefe Ansvvere Vnto Certaine Obiections and Reasons against the Descension of Christ into Hell Lately Sent in Writing Vnto a Gentleman in the Countrey*, 1604.

philosophies, including the idea that the intellect or mind is the primary cause of the cosmos, were obviously viewed as heretical in later periods. In this way, Parkes counters Willet's use of Ambrose with an ancient reference of his own, but he also suggests that what the argument breeds is narcissistic admiration for one's own mind over the truth. He takes the possibility of new, Protestant pastors as viable wet-nurses inherent in Willet's image and exchanges it for a self-referential creature who sucks "pride and singularity" from its mother's breast. The implication here is that there is an appropriate mother, one from whom the English people can draw the wisdom of antiquity and piety over absurd questioning. Anyone who would remove the English from this mother, Parkes suggests, are "overweening."

The idea of breastfeeding and weaning children is thematically related to the idea of family recognition, which I discuss further in the last section and touch on only briefly here. The theological debates do not take on the issue of family recognition in the same explicit way that the Harrowing literature does; however, the typological resemblances between Christ and Adam are thematically important because they indicate a way of looking at the interrelationship of man and Jesus that is changed as a result of predestination theology. John Higin's response to William Perkins shows the centrality of Adam and Christ's relationship to the debate. Unlike their medieval Catholic counterparts, Reformed Protestants do not acknowledge the idea that Jesus brought Adam out of hell during the Harrowing, but they do seem concerned with Jesus as the second Adam. The fact that the typological connection with Adam can be linked with denying the descent has to do with the concept of the elect and the wide-spread belief that Adam

and the patriarchs could not have been in hell because God would never let an elect person suffer as a reprobate. As we saw in the second chapter, Spenser's text highlights the concern of what gets brought back from hell if no elect people can be damned there. Thus, William Perkins uses the typology between Adam and Christ to disprove the descent, and John Higin's replies,

In this matter there can be no resemblaunce betweene them; for the first Adam was not presently cast out of paradise after his death, but nine hundred yeares before he died, or was buried. The second Adam ascended into the heauenlye Paradise after his death, burial, descension and resurrection. The first Adam went out of the earthly Paradise with a mortall body; the seconde Adam went into the heauenly with a glorified body. (B2r)²³¹

Higin's walks very literally through the logic to show that Christ's Harrowing of Hell does not have an analog in the description of Adam's life. Adam was cast out of paradise before he died, and Christ entered paradise after he died. One paradise is earthly, that of Eden, and the other is heavenly. The heavenly paradise does not admit a "mortal" body unless it has been "glorified." Higin's emphasis on details like Adam's age when he left paradise shows the importance of keeping the image, the simple story, in mind to prevent straying from faith through intellectual questions. Hindsight, represented by close reading and acceptance of the image and story, brings wisdom, and inherited belief supersedes knowledge gained through rationalization or inquiry.

²³¹ John Higin, *An Ansvvere to Master William Perkins, Concerning Christs Descension into Hell: By John Higin*. Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 1144:02. (Oxford : By Ioseph Barnes, printer to the Vniuersitie, 1602).

Parkes explains to his Christian reader that questioning the received wisdom of the Articles of Faith is sinful and dangerous to the Church and the believer.

Far better therefore were it beseeming us with all meekness, sincerity and constancy to rely and rest settled on the maine groundes and principles of our faith; then (as a number doe) so irregiously and unchristianly to call them in question: Atheisme can sprout and spreade abroad fast inough of it selfe, (as lamentable experience dayly teacheth,) though it have no favorites or abettors to promote and propagate it: & therefore either to plante by writing, or to water by speaking the cursed rootes & seedes thereof, is neither the part of a Paule, nor of an Apollo. For to deny or doubt of any Article of the Catholike faith, what else is it, but to prepare the way to heathenish paganism, that ancient baite of Sathan, & the very poison of all Christianity? This hath unsheathed a sword which woundeth deeplelye, bred a serpent which stingeth deadly, & engendred a canker which corrupteth daily both the Church and common weale. (A2v)²³²

Like Luther, Parkes suggests that it is simple faith in the article to which Englishmen must cling. This faith should bring comfort, and believers should “rest settled” rather than to till the ground and plant the seeds of atheism. Here the questions are the seeds, but in no way do they bring forth a fruitful harvest. Instead of bringing forth something consumable, the seeds bring forth “a sword” that wounds deeply, “a serpent” with a deadly sting, and “a canker” which corrupts the flesh. For Parkes calling the Articles of Faith into question is the highly perilous road to atheism, which gains ground on its own without the help of subjects who profess to be Christians. He changes the terms of the debate from Protestants versus Catholics or Jews to Christians versus Pagans, thus characterizing all his opponents as heretical non-Christians. His argument is explicitly against the new naturalist philosophy that works against the common knowledge

²³² Parkes, *A Briefe Ansvvere Vnto Certaine Obiections and Reasons against the Descension of Christ into Hell Lately Sent in Writing Vnto a Gentleman in the Countrey*, 1604.

supposedly shared by the people of England. Parkes insists that true Christians do not support singular or novel interpretations of scripture. It is far better for English subjects to accept, support, and even defend the Articles of Faith as they exist than to seek for new roads to salvation, which do not exist.

Throughout the debates between Higin and Perkins, Parkes and Willet, the epistemological issues that separate faith and reason, or inquiry are brought into question. Higin and Parkes insist that the Church of England clergymen should preach the Article of Faith that Christ Descended into hell confidently and without fear of contradiction because it is an inherited belief that would be sinful to question. Willet and implicitly Perkins counter this argument by saying that Christ did suffer the pains of hell, but only metaphorically on the cross. For Willet and Perkins the issue is the sufficiency of Christ's suffering, but for Higin and Parkes, the important part of Christ's descending into hell is that he triumphed over Satan and preached to the damned souls. In one view, Christ is the passive sufferer, but in the other, he is the active conquerer of evil. Though it is common to associate faith with passivity, the type of faith that Parkes and Higin insist upon is actually an active defense of belief, one that encourages a view of Christ as triumphant and heroic. Shakespeare appropriates this Christ because he is far more capable of combatting the evils of the world represented by Leontes's madness and subsequent tyranny and abuse than one who suffers in silence.

Paulina: Counselor, St. Margaret, and Christ

Critics have recently interpreted Paulina as a variety of positive figures. She is a counselor to the King, a representative of the oracle of the law, and a type of priest who enables Eucharistic devotion. Diane Dixon notes that “Paulina’s transgressive and artful words are the hard medicine that brings about the healing needed in Leontes’ kingdom.”²³³ Virginia Strain argues that Paulina is an avatar of the oracle: “While Apollo’s oracle makes a minor appearance in the form of its pronouncement that is revealed during the trial scene, its judicial presence is nevertheless extended through the play via its avatars: Paulina and Camillo.”²³⁴ Jensen contends that Paulina’s final act makes her a consecrator of the Eucharistic sacrament where she transforms the statue into the real presence of Hermione.²³⁵ What these interpretations have in common is the recognition of Paulina’s power in the play and largely positive interpretation of her actions as beneficial for the king and the country of Sicilia. To associate Paulina with medicine and healing, prophecy and law, and ritual and magic is to essentially define her as a Christ-figure. The Christ of the Harrowing also plays many roles, cast as a magician before Pilate, a warrior at the gates, and an advocate for humanity in his debate with Satan. If her actions do not speak clearly enough to her powerful character, Shakespeare links her with a popular virgin martyr and saint.

²³³ Diane Dixon, “‘Away with that audacious lady’: Paulina’s Rhetoric in *The Winter’s Tale*.” *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium*. 4 (2004), 41.

²³⁴ Virginia Strain, “*The Winter’s Tale* and the Oracle of the Law.” *English Literary History* 78, no. 3 (2011), 558.

²³⁵ Jensen, “Festivity, Iconoclasm, and Catholicism in ‘The Winter’s Tale’,” 306.

In Act II of *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes associates Paulina with St. Margaret of Antioch when he is speaking to her husband, Antigonus: "You that have been so tenderly officious / With Lady Margery, your midwife there, / To save this bastard's life" (II.iii.196-198). Remarkably, this reference has not previously been linked to the popular saint. In the Bedford edition, Mario DiGangi explains "Lady Margery" as "a derisive term" that is connected to calling her "Dame Partlet" just a few lines earlier.²³⁶ John Pitcher similarly notes the double hen references in the Arden edition and adds "Leontes mistakenly believes that Paulina helped deliver the baby, and therefore knows that Polixines is the father."²³⁷ Margery, however, is also a variant of Margaret, and coming so close to the term midwife was bound to make the association for audiences with Saint Margaret, the patron saint of childbirth.²³⁸ Though Julia Reinhard Lupton notes that Paulina associates herself with the martyred saints when she reports Hermione's death to the court, she does not single out St. Margaret as a particular influence.²³⁹ Other critics have noticed the cultural power of the reference to midwife, but none have put the two together to show the link with Saint Margaret who is the patron saint of childbirth.²⁴⁰

Viewing Paulina in this interconnected set of images links her practice of science, magic,

²³⁶ Mario DiGangi, *The Winter's Tale: Texts and Contexts*. Bedford, St. Martin's, 2008.

²³⁷ John Pitcher, *The Winter's Tale* Arden Shakespeare, 2001. n.158 on page 216

²³⁸ "Margaret, n." OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/114016?p=emailAK11KS6k41XTM&d=114016> (accessed November 10, 2013).

²³⁹ Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Afterlives of the Saints: Hagiography, Typology, and Renaissance Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 211.

²⁴⁰ See for example, Alison Findlay's *Women in Shakespeare: A History* (New York: Continuum, 2010) where she writes of midwives: "The midwife's importance lay not just in physically delivering the baby, but in being the first to culturally define it" (268). In the case of Paulina, the second aspect of the midwife is even more important since she is the one to define Perdita as Leontes's heir and therefore the leader of Sicilia. See also, Dowd, *Women's Work*, in which she states, "Midwives were licensed and authoritative workers, and their geographical mobility was a valued and often necessary component of their labor" (61).

and religion in a way that helps to explain the cohesiveness of these discourses in early modern culture and to show how a truly righteous female character makes use of all of these sources of power to meet her desired ends. In this case, Paulina's desired end is to rid Sicilia of tyranny just as Christ's motivation is to rid the world of the tyranny of Satan's rule over sinners.

When Leontes's threatens to burn Paulina, she responds bravely, by reversing the accusation and insisting that she is ready to die for the truth and defeat of tyranny. She says:

I care not.
It is an heretic that makes the fire,
Not she which burns in't. I'll not call you tyrant;
But this most cruel usage of your queen,
Not able to produce more accusation
Than your own weak-hinged fancy, something savors
Of tyranny and will ignoble make you,
Yea, scandalous to the world. (II.iii.114-121)

Paulina's brave acceptance of her possible martyrdom further associates her with the female saints of the Catholic faith. Here she changes the connotations of the burning—not a staunch Protestant burning a witch, but a Jew or Pagan burning a saint—to urge Leontes to consider the long-term consequences of his rash actions. She calls him a heretic for his lack of faith in his wife and his tendencies toward tyranny, a version of the deadly sin of pride. Though she is not executed for her direct confrontation with the king, these scenes show Paulina as willing to sacrifice herself for the innocent Hermione and

Perdita. Through these brief references Shakespeare prepares the audience for the miraculous feats she will perform by the end of the play.

Because recreating Paulina as a figure of the Harrowing Christ imbues her with a great deal of agency, it is important to remember that Renaissance England had its own mechanisms for containing aberrant female behavior, but it is equally important to emphasize the fissures in the patriarchal social order that allowed women opportunities to participate in power structures like the court. Sometimes the best way to understand female power is to look at how the play ends for the woman, to observe how her power is contained. Stephen Orgel has suggested that *The Winter's Tale* represents Leontes's fantasy of immortality and that all the possibilities for inheritance are cut off in order to allow Leontes supreme dictatorship. He writes:

For Shakespeare's age, the restoration of Perdita, the finding of the heir, the continuance of the royal line, is the crucial element; even Hermione says she has preserved herself to see Perdita, not Leontes. And once the losses are restored, Paulina returns to her proper status of obedient wife—to somebody, to anybody, to whomever the king chooses. Grace and wonder inhere only in kingship. *The Winter's Tale* is very much a royalist, patriarchal vision, and the extent to which it succeeds for modern audiences and readers is a measure of the extent to which we are still willing to buy into that ideology.²⁴¹

While it is true that Paulina is safely married off to Camillo at the end of the play, this does not erase the fact that it is *her* actions that make this “crucial element” in the play fall into place. Paulina is responsible for saving Perdita from the dungeon and giving Antigonus the opportunity to offer his own life for hers. She orchestrates the scene in

²⁴¹ Stephen Orgel, “The Winter's Tale: A Modern Perspective.” *The Winter's Tale*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Washington Square Press, 1998), 271-272.

which Hermione is given the opportunity to say that she has preserved herself to see Perdita. And Perdita is a female monarch, hardly the ideal of a “patriarchal vision.” Moreover, Paulina’s marriage to Camillo is the union of two powerful personalities who have shown themselves willing to challenge the power of the king. Paulina’s character and her rebellious actions question the idea of absolute monarchy at least as much as the play reifies this worldview by the end. In this section, I show how this powerful female character draws on her likeness to Christ to further her ability to perform magic and engender faith.

Shakespeare’s contribution to the debate over Christ’s descent into hell recreates the narrative familiar to early modern audiences from the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and the drama and poetry based on this text. That Shakespeare engages in the rewriting of scripture is not an unfamiliar argument; in the recently translated *The Gospel according to Shakespeare*, Piero Boitani argues that Shakespeare’s romances “constitute *his* good news, *his* Gospel.”²⁴² He notes that women play “an integral part” in this reimagined scripture: “The Gospel according to Shakespeare is wonderfully inflected and proclaimed in feminine form.”²⁴³ Though Boitani does not discuss Shakespeare’s retelling of apocryphal scripture, the idea that Shakespeare focuses on the role of women is certainly true of his retelling of the Harrowing of Hell in *The Winter’s Tale*. Shakespeare creates a female Christ-figure in Paulina. The Christ to whom Shakespeare connects Paulina is specifically a Harrowing Christ because he serves as the midwife who delivers the souls

²⁴² Piero Boitani, *The Gospel according to Shakespeare*. Trans. Vittorio Montemaggi and Rachel Jacoff. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 1.

²⁴³ Ibid, 8.

of the patriarchs and prophets from the womb-like hell in the earth. Equally important is his confrontation with Satan where he uses words to attack hell's claim on human life. Shakespeare makes this connection clear for his readers by linking Paulina with St. Margaret of Antioch. St. Margaret is the patron saint of childbirth because she delivers herself from the belly of a dragon. Her confrontation with this dragon begins, however, with her asking God to allow her to defy Satan face to face. In the image from the 1498 *Golden Legend*, we can see Margaret standing in the dragon who is slit open as in a caesarian section procedure. Though there are similarities with the picture of St. George from the same text, St. Margaret is distinguished both by her long hair and the dragon's wide gash from which she seems to be ascending. John King notes when Queen Margaret entered Coventry in 1456, "pageantry...stressed her intercessory role by presenting her in the dragon-killing role of St. Margaret, a female variation of the traditional dragon slayer and British royal icon, St. George."²⁴⁴ Because she is described as a midwife and she performs actions of harrowing, Paulina embodies a seventeenth-century interpretation of St. Margaret. The metaphors of family and nursing that are carried throughout the early seventeenth-century debates over Christ's descent into hell are brought to life in the play where Paulina, like St. Margaret, confronts the evil of Leontes's madness and acts as midwife for Perdita and savior for Hermione.

The two interrelated references that St. Margaret of Antioch brings to the text have interesting implications specifically for this play. As the defeater of dragons, St.

²⁴⁴ John King, "The Godly Woman in Elizabethan Iconography." *Renaissance Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (1985), 52.

Margaret is associated with St. George, who brings the nationalistic sentiments discussed in the second chapter. But as Strain has pointed out, Paulina is also an “avatar” of Apollo’s oracle at Delphi, and this reference also brings together dragons and maternity. Delphi is the site of Apollo’s defeat of Python, the great dragon who served as guard to his mother Gaia’s navel.²⁴⁵ And, of course, as Giles Morgan points out, the dragon “can be seen as symbolizing...the ultimate victory of Christ over the devil.”²⁴⁶ Thus the dragon that haunts the text through both the Christian (Pauline) side and the Classical (Apollo) side represents the problematic forces that must be overcome by a woman in the form of Paulina. The second element of the St. Margaret reference is the idea that she is the patron saint of childbirth. As the midwife, Paulina is the designated expert on Leontes’ royal line and the delivery of children. In order to highlight the importance of the righteous midwife, Shakespeare draws on and complicates the already complex metaphors of the descent debates. He depicts Leontes as ripping Mamillius from Hermione and sending Perdita away from her mother in order to contrast this horrific care of the mother and baby with Paulina’s appropriate care. The consequences of tearing the children from their mother are both tragic and laughable. Mamillius dies without maternal care, and Perdita’s replacement nurses are clown-like shepherds who gain more from her than she does from them. The nursing metaphor is made literal in *The Winter’s*

²⁴⁵ David Leeming, *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Leeming writes that Apollo is a version of “the god-hero who defeats the monster—in this case, the Python. Almost always the monster/dragon/serpent is associated with the chthonic powers of the ancient great mother, whose powers are then taken over by the Indo-European patriarchy” (164). Shakespeare’s appropriation of the Apollo myth here is further evidence of his concern with women’s power since the avatar of this oracle is, in fact, female.

²⁴⁶ Giles Morgan, *St. George: Knight, Martyr, Patron, Saint, and Dragonslayer* (Edison, NJ: Chartwell Books, Inc. 2006), 59.

Tale in the form of Mamillius, whose name comes from mamilla or “male breast.”²⁴⁷

Read in the context of the descent debates however, it becomes clear that Mamillius’s early death shows the futility of male nursing. Shakespeare emphasizes the need for female care in this text: Parliament can be no more successful in nursing England’s children than Mamillius is in fulfilling the promise of his father’s kingdom. What might seem initially like an offhand reference to midwifery in the play is actually central to Shakespeare’s argument about faith and family life.

Furthermore, in her role as St. Margaret, harrower of Leontes, Paulina enacts the shift between the military standard and the quill made visually clear by the image accompanying Adam Hill’s text discussed in the previous chapter by using words as her method of combat. Even after she has convinced him that he has indeed martyred his wife, she continues to abuse him with words. Sixteen years later when Leontes, Paulina, and the courtiers are discussing whether or not Leontes should remarry, Paulina again jabs at him, reminding him of his role in Hermione’s death. Leontes responds, “Killed? / She I killed? I did so, but *thou strik’st me* / Sorely to say I did” (V.i.19-20, emphasis mine). Leontes equates her words with blows directly in his response by saying that she strikes him. The implication is that she has been performing such verbal feats continuously in the interim.

Once she has defeated Leontes with words, Paulina is ready to perform the final action of the harrowing: restoring the righteous to life. The construction of these central

²⁴⁷ “mamilla, n.”. OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/113123?rskey=RA2TAI&result=5&isAdvanced=false> (accessed November 06, 2013).

scenes makes it possible to read Paulina's later miraculous feats as further associated with Christ's ability to raise the dead. In other words, the extended "Porter scene" and its associations with martyrdom and miracle show how Shakespeare reimagined the narrative depicted in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and in the cycle plays in order to engage in the epistemological debate over faith versus knowledge. The Harrowing Christ provides an excellent model for the "lawful" practice of magic, and though it may seem that Hermione is more easily associated with Christ because of her passion, death, and resurrection, it is actually Paulina who performs the feats of Christ in the Harrowing. Like Christ, Paulina confronts evil, overcomes gates, defeats a ruler with words, and rescues souls through some combination of trickery and miracle. In order to highlight the connections between faith, science, and magic, I will focus on Paulina's spiritual promotion through association with St. Margaret of Antioch, defeater of dragons and patron saint of childbirth, and the final act in which she insists that faith is necessary for lawful magic. I contend that Shakespeare reimagines Christ's descent into hell with a female Christ-figure, and in doing so, he depicts women's power as derived from religious and magical/quasi-scientific knowledge but effective in political arenas.

A Tyrannical King Makes the Court Hell

Before discussing Paulina's harrowing actions in Sicilia, it is first necessary to illuminate how Shakespeare depicts this kingdom as like a hell. In this section I argue that *The Winter's Tale* draws on the harrowing narrative especially in its collapse of distinctions between the Fall, the descent, and the Last Judgment. As discussed in the

first chapter, the concept of “sacred time” keeps the Fall, the Harrowing, and the Last Judgment as overlapping and interrelated concepts, an idea that is only solidified by a view of the Harrowing that sees it as the completion of the contract made between God, Satan, and man at the Fall. A harrowing scene requires a “hell” and the fall into atheism links Leontes and Polixines with devils. Shakespeare’s narrative transforms theological events that are spread over thousands of years of biblical history into a more condensed and focused tale. Leontes and Polixines fall as a result of their reliance on knowledge, create horrid, untenable situations for their offspring, and then are redeemed through active displays of faith in one story rather than three.

Satan, Christ, and Adam/mankind figure in all three biblical narratives, and the narratives depict the major confrontations between God, Satan, and man. In *The Winter’s Tale*, Leontes and Polixines volley between being innocent men before the Fall, fallen angels guilty of pride, and tyrannical rulers of their own domains. Leontes resembles Adam in his fall through the assumption of women’s sin, but he is also similar to Satan in his pride and his unwillingness to listen to reason from any source. Polixines describes himself as virtually identical to Leontes in the opening scenes, and, indeed, his behavior at the sheep shearing in Act IV shows that he is easily as rash as his childhood friend. The conversations between Polixines and Hermione at the opening of the play figure the court as a postlapsarian hellscape that looks back at the Fall. Leontes and Polixines are figured as fallen angels. The court is a prison and a place of judgment and punishment that is typologically linked to Eden. Leontes becomes the arch villain circumscribed by his own tortuous mind.

Leontes and Polixenes are like fallen angels or Adams in the Garden of Eden in their initial innocence and emphasis on pride. Polixenes describes the close friends as suspended in a place of innocence and complete confidence:

We were, fair Queen,
Two lads that thought there was no more behind
But such a day tomorrow as today,
And to be boy eternal...
We were as twinned lambs that did frisk i'th' sun
And bleat the one at th'other. What we changed
Was innocence for innocence; we knew not
The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dreamed
That any did. Had we pursued that life,
And our weak spirits ne'er been higher reared
With stronger blood, we should have answered heaven
Boldly 'Not guilty,' the imposition cleared
Hereditary ours. (I.ii.66-75)

Polixenes describes the pair as animal like, wholly untutored and without guile, but he also associates this with “weak spirits” and not the wisdom or cunning of kings. This initial description echoes the Garden of Eden in its lack of education and knowledge. They “knew not” any doctrines, nor did they conceive of time or guilt, but it also shows the tendency toward pride in the willingness to “answer heaven boldly.” The equation of early life with a lack of education is important because it implies a fall through knowledge rather than through sex. This is especially important given that Leontes’ redemption must happen through a refusal of observable knowledge or an active reliance on faith.

Hermione quickly notes these connotations and responds to the implication that she and Polixenes’ wife must then play Eves. In refusing to play Eve, Hermione gives

Polixines (and by implication Leontes) access to a reformed narrative of the fall that does not require leaving women entirely but instead figures monogamy as the acceptable continuance of human relations. When Polixines says, “Temptations have since then been born to ’s, for / In those unfledged days was my wife a girl; / Your precious self has then not crossed the eyes / Of my young playfellow,” he further emphasizes that the sin will be through questioning and knowledge and not desire or women’s words (I.ii.76-80). They were “unfledged” or inexperienced and not enough had crossed their eyes to tempt them. Hermione replies with the familiar narrative that suggests women are responsible for the Fall, but provides a way to resuscitate that narrative: monogamous marriage:

Of this make no conclusion, lest you say
Your queen and I are devils. Yet go on.
Th’offenses we have made you do we’ll answer,
If you first sinned with us, and that with us
You did continue fault, and that you slipped not
With any but with us. (I.ii.81-86)

Even in her speech, Hermione emphasizes that the men should “make no conclusion” insists that he can go on without saying that she and the Bohemian queen are “devils.”

If the men can avoid over-thinking and rationalizing their activities and rely on faith and simple living, all will be fine, but immediately Leontes begins to rebel against this possibility. The theme of rebellion runs throughout the play with numerous counselors speaking out against Leontes, Leontes refusing the oracle’s wisdom, and Florizel refusing to marry as Polixines wishes, but it is Leontes’ rebellion against himself that first creates conflict and is first mentioned by Camillo. Camillo describes Leontes as

“a master...in rebellion with himself” (I.ii.353-354). Leontes’s rebellion against himself is often characterized as madness, and sometimes it has been depicted as demonic possession. Stanislav Sokolov and Helena Livanova’s 1994 *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* version of *The Winter’s Tale* depicts Leontes with demons flying around his head as he accuses Hermione of adultery.²⁴⁸ Whether Leontes is mad or possessed, his rebellion against himself can also be seen as a method for acquiring new knowledge that causes him to question the basic truths he should not question. His reliance on the visual and his insistence that it must be destroyed for its proofs has also been discussed as iconoclasm. The association with iconoclasm is excellently argued by Jensen who argues that the play’s focus on festivity is an implicit argument for a return to Catholicism, but it also shows the connection between radical Protestantism with destructive intellectualism.²⁴⁹ Reading Leontes’s fall as a prideful seeking of knowledge helps to understand his redemption as an active faith that defends against questioning. But Leontes’s fall isn’t individual; instead, it recreates the whole court as a hellscape.

Shakespeare’s depiction of the Sicilian court as a hellscape reveals “hell” as a product of Leontes’ mind that manifests itself as the torturous reality for others. His description of the interaction between Polixines and Hermione begins a series of imagery that reminds the audience of hell: heat, fire, forked body parts. He says, “Too hot, too hot!” (I.ii.108) With the exception of Dante, hell was almost always depicted as a fire-

²⁴⁸ Stanislav Sokolov and Helena Livanova, *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* version of *The Winter’s Tale*. BBC 2 (1994).

²⁴⁹ Jensen, “Singing Psalms to Horn-Pipes.”

filled, hot space of torture.²⁵⁰ Furthermore, the references to cuckoldry double as references to Satan with horns and cloven hooves. Leontes describes himself as a devil/cuckold: “Inch think, knee-deep, o’er head and ears a forked one!” (I.ii.186) The next lines orally remind audience members of hell with references to “hissing” and the “grave,” which call to mind both the serpent and the realm of death. Leontes’ tyranny turns Sicilia into a place of judgment and torture. Paulina refers to Leontes’ court as one that has “studied torments”:

What studied torments, tyrant, hast for me?
 What wheels, racks, fires? What flaying, boiling
 In leads or oils? What old or newer torture
 Must I receive, whose every word deserves
 To taste of thy most worst? (III.ii.170-174)

Aside from the actual tortures of Mamillius, Hermione, and Perdita, which are largely carried out off stage, Paulina’s description brings to mind the actual tortures of hell that are used as punishments for evildoing. The catalogue of torture instruments simultaneously describe the anguish she feels within and present to Leontes the punishments he should have for his cold, systematic destruction of his family based only on his own “fancy,” imagination or intellect. Mamillius’s illness, Hermione’s premature labor and delivery in a dungeon, and Perdita’s removal from her mother are the actual tortures present in Sicilia, but Paulina’s words provide both the audience and Leontes with a clearer understanding of how fallen the court has become.

²⁵⁰ See Davidson, *The Iconography of Hell*.

This reliance on observable knowledge over deeper truth causes similarly heinous results in Bohemia in Act IV. Polixines, who is the “twinned lamb” of Leontes fails to learn from the tyranny in Sicilia and responds similarly to Florizell’s betrothal to Perdita as Leontes does to Hermione’s ability to convince Polixines to stay. Polixines himself recognizes that there is something unusual about Perdita. He says of her, “This is the prettiest lowborn lass that ever / Ran on the greensward. Nothing she does or seems / But smacks of something greater than herself, / Too noble for this place” (IV.iv.156-159). He intuitively feels that Perdita is “something greater” and “too noble,” but he ignores his feelings and depends on sight alone to judge her. His reaction to Perdita is very similar to Leontes’s reaction to Hermione: utter destruction. When Polixines finds that Florizell intends to marry Perdita without his permission, he exclaims that he will “have [Perdita’s] beauty scratched with briars and made / More homely than [her] state.” (IV.iv.405-406). Polixines follows Leontes in mistaking the objects of his study as objects entirely. Both Hermione and Perdita are more than things to be observed; they are subjects that both kings sacrifice to their own prideful questioning.

These scenes suggest that Shakespeare takes seriously the idea of a fall through knowledge and shows how the questing after knowledge leads to an unhealthy reliance on human powers of observation. While it seems that the acknowledgement of the flawed nature of intellectual pursuit would destroy any opportunity for agency, Shakespeare’s narrative suggests that faith has its own set of appropriate actions. The set of actions that defend faith and confront the iconoclastic impulses of the men who rely on their human faculties are appropriately seen as rituals, or the emulation of the actions that, according

to Christian exegetical logic, redeemed mankind from their own sin and the powers of evil that here Shakespeare associates with iconoclasm and tyranny. These harrowing actions, in the hands of an appropriate Christ-figure, rid the world of tyranny and the chaos that would ensue if the heirs were lost permanently. Paulina fulfills the role of appropriate Christ-figure by confronting Leontes and rescuing Perdita.

Paulina Harrows Hell

One of the ways that the Harrowing of Hell has been seen as a source for Shakespeare plays is through scenes evocative of the “porter scene” in the cycle dramas. The “porter scene” is the theatrical form of the ritual knocking at the gates of hell that was performed by priests in the Middle Ages. In the drama, the knocking is seen as initiating a comedic interlude where the group of demons or devils designated as porters first realize Christ is coming to spoil hell and start to run around like the proverbial chickens with their heads cut off. The chaos and slapstick violence of the devils, which is quickly followed by Satan being put in his place, was a humorous moment in the otherwise serious crucifixion and resurrection narrative, but as I argue in the first chapter, the Harrowing was much more than comic relief and it is unlikely that its associations were entirely comic in the Renaissance reimaginings of it. Certainly it has the potential to be a very scary scene. In 1823, Thomas De Quincey explained that his unnerving reaction to the “Porter scene” in *Macbeth* resulted from a surprising sympathy with the murderers Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. The knocking on the door, which he attributes to “the genius

of Shakespeare,” represents the point in which the everyday activity of the real world invades upon the solemnity and artistry of the murders:

Hence it is that, when the deed is done, when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds: the knocking at the gate is heard, and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced; the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish; the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the reestablishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended them.²⁵¹

De Quincey was likely unaware that the scene that so affected him was actually not the result of Shakespeare’s individual genius at all, but an appropriation of a tradition from medieval drama and liturgy: Christ’s knocking at the gates of hell in order to harrow the innocent souls within. Kurt Schreyer notes that the porter scene in *Macbeth* is actually a retelling of the Harrowing in which the knocking “prompts the Porter . . . to tell jokes and ask questions in the manner of traditional devil-porter behavior in the mysteries.”

Schreyer argues that, rather than being part of a play dedicated to valorizing King James’s reign, this scene “is in fact an elaborate joke that undermines the Crown’s claims to sacred authority.”²⁵² Because the Harrowing of Hell’s central focus is a debate between two princes over their rights to hostages, works drawing specifically from this cycle pick up the resonances of issues with authority. Thus the onstage actions of knocking on the gates and/or breaking one’s way into a court is reminiscent of the cycle play porter scenes

²⁵¹ Thomas De Quincey, “On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*.” *The Works of Thomas De Quincey* (1823): 1876-82.

²⁵² Kurt Schreyer, “‘Here’s a Knocking Indeed!’: *Macbeth* and the Harrowing of Hell.” *Upstart Crow* 29 (2010): 26-43, 26-27.

discussed by other critics in conjunction with *Macbeth*, but it has not been noted that in *The Winter's Tale*, issues of authority are questioned in a similar scene.

As De Quincey points out of the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth*, Paulina's appearance at this juncture in the play is a climactic moment that signals the end of Leontes uncontested madness but also highlights the horror (the awful parenthesis) the Sicilian court and the audience have just witnessed. The work of darkness is hardly the perfect work of art it is in *Macbeth*. In *The Winter's Tale*, there is no ambition in which to revel or bloody violence to simultaneously attract and repulse us. The dread experienced here is the dull, embarrassing pain of witnessing domestic violence or another crime too personal for our intervention. Rather than feel sympathy for Leontes, audiences are led to identify with Paulina's bravery and hope for the best for the child, Perdita. Unfortunately, Shakespeare has further atrocities to depict in Sicilia, and bringing the baby up from prison proves just a small part of Paulina's harrowing of this courtly hell. If we ever mused that Polixines's nine-month visit was too perfectly timed for Hermione's nine-month pregnancy, we are disabused of any tendency to agree with the King when he orders both Paulina and the innocent child burned.

By depicting a scene where a moral figure descends into a prison to release the righteous souls within and then breaks through guards to confront a mad tyrant, Shakespeare's romance expands "the porter scene" to emphasize the seriousness of the religious and political commentary. The savior appears in the form of Paulina, though her methods are slightly different than Christ, who breaks down gates and binds Satan until the Last Judgment. Paulina must rely on a combination of wisdom, wit, and humility to

confront Leontes. The audience is not introduced to Paulina until she is knocking on the gates of the prison in which Hermione is being detained with her newborn infant. It is worth noting at this point that throughout the Middle Ages in England, hell was represented as a fortress/prison or as the mouth of a beast onstage; thus, the stage props alone may have mirrored those of the Harrowing.²⁵³ Paulina's first lines, "The keeper of the prison, call to him. Let him have knowledge who I am" (II.ii.1-2) reenacts the first lines of Christ in the Chester, Townley, and York cycle plays by calling to the jailer and relying on her reputation. The Latin was so familiar to the audiences of these plays that often it went un-translated, but in Middle English, he said, "Open up hell-gates annone, ye prynces of pyne everychon, that Godes Sonne may in gonne, and the kinge of blys."²⁵⁴ In the Townely version, after Christ demands the gates be opened, a demon asks, "What art thou that spekys so?" and Christ replies, "A kyng of blys that hight ihesus."²⁵⁵ In *The Winter's Tale*, the exchange that follows further emphasizes Paulina's expectation to be admitted to the prison based on her position and reputation. "Now, good sir, You know me, do you not?" she asks the jailer (II.ii.4-5). The jailer replies, "For a worthy lady and one who much I honor" (II.ii.5-6). This exchange positions the jailer as the unwilling upholder of Leontes's dictates and Paulina as the righteous liberator of Hermione. The words "good," "worthy," "honor," and "pray" appear together to further highlight the undisputed understanding of Paulina as the figure of good. She carries this

²⁵³ For more information on the Harrowing of Hell stage props, please see Peter Meredith, "The iconography of hell in the English cycles: A practical perspective." *The Iconography of Hell* (1992): 158-186.

²⁵⁴ Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, "Harrowing," lines 153-6.

²⁵⁵ Rose, *The Wakefield Mystery Plays*, "Harrowing," lines 198-9.

understanding, and the innocent Perdita, into the courtroom for a second metaphorical “banging on the gates.”

The second half of “the porter scene” draws from some of the more comedic elements of the Harrowing pageant as Paulina’s straightforward talk makes her husband, Antigonus, the butt of henpecked husband jokes. Leontes’s madness becomes funny only in the face of the simple truth Paulina represents: he is paranoid. No one is or has been trying to hurt him in any way. Leontes senses at least the possibility of this laughter and before Paulina enters he says, “Camillo and Polixines laugh at me, make their pastime at my sorrow. They should not laugh if I could reach them, nor shall she, within my power” (II.iii.23-26). Though he talks a big game, he is immediately confronted with an outspoken older woman who will make his accusations look as unfounded as they are. A lord says to Paulina, “You must not enter” (II.iii.26). Cue the courtly demons behaving inefficiently and chaotically. Paulina even gives them an opportunity for redemption, “Be second to me,” she says, “Fear you his tyrannous passion more, alas, than the Queen’s life?”; however, they continue to half-heartedly attempt to restrain her (II.iii.27-29). Though this scene is both preceded and followed by scenes of tragedy and cruelty, this moment represents the humor possible in the “Porter scene” nicely. Leontes gets increasingly frustrated with Antigonus, asking whether or not he can control his wife. Amusingly, Antigonus replies, “Hang all the husbands that cannot do that feat, you’ll leave yourself hardly one subject” (II.iii.110-112). Paulina proves not only uncontrollable but the only sensible person in the room. She maintains her composure throughout,

despite the King's ability to see even the most obvious similarities between himself and the child.

These scenes, perhaps more than any others in the play, would have readily reminded audiences of the "Harrowing" plays from the medieval cycles. The props and the jokes may serve as a quasi-comic interlude in the acts of domestic violence, but they also alerted the audience to the high stakes of Leontes's madness. Innocent lives are in danger because of his actions, and Paulina is clearly cast in the role to mitigate the force of his misguided punishments. In as much as Leontes's iconoclastic madness has rendered him an atheist, the answer must be to provide him with the opportunity for an emotional experience that can redeem him. It is precisely this sort of experience that I argue the audience would expect after the "porter scene" in the Sicilian court.

Shakespeare Revives the Mother

The final act of the play provides the emotional scenes of reunion and forgiveness that serve as the answer to the horror of the earlier scenes and provide aesthetic balance to the tragi-comedy. In *The Winter's Tale* these scenes are possibly problematic for a few related reasons. Perdita's reunion with Leontes, which does feel fortuitous and even miraculous, is actually not staged. After the intensity of the trial scene in Act III and the recurrence of the iconoclastic atheism at the end of Act IV (when Polixines threatens to mar Perdita's face and have her foster parents killed), the fact that this scene is not staged feels like an act of deception on the part of the playwright. It seems as though we should have the opportunity to see both Leontes's and Polixines's shame when they apologize to

their children for their horrible mistakes. It seems also that we should feel the full force of the beauty of Perdita's and Florizel's forgiveness of their parents. It seems as though only this scene could assuage the justified anger from the earlier scenes. As Michael O'Connell notes, "It is a scene of pure narration that paradoxically—and seemingly perversely—only recounts the recognition that the audience had presumed it would witness."²⁵⁶ The "pure narration" of this scene, however, also connects it to the gospels, and the *Gospel of Nicodemus* specifically because of the witnessing. All the gospels are third person narratives of the miraculous, but this is especially true in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* because Nicodemus himself is not purported to have been to hell. Instead, Leucius and Charinus, two Jewish men who died just before Christ's passion and crucifixion, tell Nicodemus about Christ's descent and defeat of Satan. Leucius and Charinus are said to have been separated and asked to recount their experiences. Their writings were afterwards found to be completely identical. Like the gentlemen on the stage in Act V, scene ii of Shakespeare's play, Leucius and Charinus experience for us what we cannot experience for ourselves. Thus, though the audience may be disappointed not to see the confrontation and forgiveness that insists Leontes and Polixines accept and confess their crimes, a biblically literate audience is also used to receiving miracle second-hand.

In this penultimate scene of *The Winter's Tale*, the several gentlemen on stage discuss the awe-inspiring reunion of Leontes, King of Sicilia, with his daughter, Perdita.

²⁵⁶Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 139.

The First Gentleman says of the company witnessing the reunion, “They looked as they had heard of a world ransomed, or one destroyed” (V.ii.15-16). This paradoxical statement, expressing the truth that one scene can indicate both the redemption and the destruction of a world, also describes the situation in hell just after Christ’s harrowing. That is, the fact that Paulina, Leontes and the other Sicilians see in Perdita the deliverance of their world from uncertainty at the same time that Paulina finds her world bereft of her husband forever and everyone realizes that Perdita will never meet her brother Mamilius or her mother Hermione describes a world both ransomed and destroyed. Christ’s Harrowing of Hell also mixes redemption and devastation in that Christ descends into hell, defeats Satan, and returns with the righteous who died before his birth. In the Harrowing episode in *Piers Plowman*, Christ describes himself as ransoming the patriarchs from hell: “But by right and by resound raunceoun [ransom] here my lyges [liegemen]” (XVIII.348).²⁵⁷ In the Towneley cycle, Jesus says, “I haue thaym boght fro bayll” (XXV.289).²⁵⁸ As discussed in Chapter 2, Christ ransomed the righteous souls from hell who died before he was born and who were therefore subject to Old Testament law. In addition to ransoming the prophets and patriarchs, Jesus also destroys the power of hell, fulfilling the second part of the First Gentleman’s statement. The audience of the Harrowing plays (or the readers of Langland’s text), like the group who witness Leontes’s and Perdita’s reunion, see a world ransomed and one destroyed. When Paulina “lift[s] the Princess from the earth, and so locks her in embracing,” just

²⁵⁷ All quotations are taken from the Norton Critical Edition, William Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Stephen H. A. Shepherd (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006).

²⁵⁸ All quotations are taken from the EETS edition, Anonymous, *The Towneley Plays*, ed. George England and Alfred W. Pollard (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).

before she reanimates Hermione's statue, she is performing the actions of a Harrowing Christ (V.ii.77-85).

The Harrowing of Hell texts from the Middle Ages also emphasize the importance of family recognition in the role of salvation. In the literary texts, such as the Digby *Harrowing of Hell*, Christ acknowledges Adam as his father and Abraham as part of his line and takes pity on them in their tortured state.

Adam, adam, ich ȝaf mi lif
ffor þe and for eve, þi wif;
Wendest þou I were ded for nowt?
ffor mi deþ was monkun bout;
Adam, nou I sege hit þe,
To-day þou salt alesed be
And comen to paraies blisse,
Perof ne salt þou neuere misse. (167-174)²⁵⁹

Christ's words to Adam show reassurance that he will now be saved from his tortures and shall never miss him again. This correction of the father by the son is reinterpreted in Act V, scene ii when Perdita is said to forgive her father and accept his blessing on her marriage. What seems like an inversion of social order—a child correcting a parent—is seen as appropriate, indeed inevitable, when associated with Adam and Christ's typological relationship because Christ is the correction of Adam's sin. Christ's words to Abraham also show the importance of recognizing family lines in the process of forgiveness:

²⁵⁹ Hulme, ed. *The Middle-English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus*. "Adam, Adam, I gave my life / For you and for Eve, your wife; / Did you think I died for nothing? / With my death was mankind bought; / Adam, now I say it when, / Today you shall be redeemed / And come into the bliss of paradise, / Whereof you never again shall miss." (Translation mine.)

Wel ich wot þat þou art abraam,
 Of mine cunne þat þou cam,
 More þat bereweþ þi riȝtwisnese
 Þene þe doþ þi sibnesse;
 Abraam, I wot ful wel
 Þat hit is soþ, eueruch del,
 Þat mi suete moder was
 Bigeten of þy suete fles;
 Abraam, I suge hit þe,
 To-day þou sal alesed be (183-192).²⁶⁰

Christ's refers to Abraham's participation in his lineage as ancillary to his salvation—his righteousness is still the primary cause, but his kinship to Christ is emphasized. Certainly the fact that the three men share the same blood supports Adam's and Abraham's claim to salvation and deliverance from hell. It is clear that Christ acknowledges Adam and Abraham as parents at the same time that he redeems them from hell. Furthermore, this logic is easily extended to all men who are sons of Adam and brothers and sisters of Christ. The issues of parenting and family recognition and forgiveness serve as a vehicle for a larger concern about inherited belief versus individual interpretation. Shakespeare's recasting of these thematic elements in his tragi-comedy suggests that the English should gently correct their parental Catholicism rather than pushing for too much reform. While these efforts guard against Puritanism, they also emphasize respect for the past and for the lineage of faith and religion in England.

Despite these similarities with the Harrowing of Hell texts, witnessing is not the primary mode of the theater, and Shakespeare has other reasons for denying the audience

²⁶⁰ Ibid. "Well I know that you are Abraham, / Of my kin that you came, / More they repent your righteousness / Than they do your kinship; / Abraham, I know full well / That this is truth, every part That my sweet mother was / Begot of your sweet flesh; / Abraham, I tell this sweetly, / Today you shall blessed be." (Translation mine.)

this scene of reconciliation.²⁶¹ If our need for balance is satisfied by the penultimate scene, the final scene would not have the tremendous emotional impact that it has. In some ways, Paulina's reanimation of Hermione simply trumps the reunion of Perdita and Leontes, an emotional fact that counters Stephen Orgel's claim that enjoyment and acceptance of *The Winter's Tale* indicates a fundamentally conservative and patriarchal political perspective discussed earlier in this chapter. Moreover, the reunion scene does not contain the spiritual or religious resonances Shakespeare obviously meant to highlight in this play. The facts that Hermione's soul is encased in art, that Paulina must perform "lawful magic" to release it, and that it is Hermione's forgiveness and not Perdita's that answers the pain of the previous acts show that Shakespeare's preoccupation is not simply with the literal narrative of the kingdoms of Sicilia and Bohemia but with the English relationship to its Catholic past and its way forward as it heals from the destructive force of iconoclasm. This scene, which O'Connell calls "a theatrical stroke of unparalleled boldness," also demonstrates Shakespeare's views on the interrelatedness of religion, magic, and trickery.²⁶² Reformers frequently accused Catholic priests of attempting to hoodwink believers with the magic trick of the Eucharistic sacrament. And as Rosenfield has pointed out the proto-scientific medical profession of midwifery was also frequently associated with witchcraft or magic tricks. Rather than accept the demonization of Catholicism and midwifery as deceptive or unlawful, Shakespeare's

²⁶¹ As a primarily visual and auditory medium, theater provides the opportunity to stage action in the present tense in a way that other literature cannot. When a playwright chooses to tell a story on stage rather than act it out, this is usually a significant choice. For a similar argument about Christ's divinity in the cycle plays, see Kroll, "Power and Conflict in Medieval Ritual and Plays."

²⁶² O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye*, 139.

final scene questions this association. Shakespeare seems to ask, if the restoration of Hermione is actually a trick, does that make it any less miraculous?

To see Hermione's resurrection as a return to Catholicism is to have gone too far backwards, but to interpret the final scene as anti-Catholic or as evidence of secularization is to do it an injustice. Julia Lupton argues that "[t]he statue scene...stages the visual conditions of Catholic image worship, but only as canceled, with equal emphasis on both the act of staging and the fact of cancellation."²⁶³ I argue instead, however, that Shakespeare's final scene indicates that Paulina's actions mirror those of Christ in the harrowing and that the performance of magic, ritual, and trickery can be both conflated and considered ethical. There is plenty of "evidence" in the play to show that Hermione may have been alive in the sixteen-year interim between Mamillius's death and the return of her daughter, Perdita, just as there is plenty to indicate that Hermione is truly brought back from the dead. The second gentlemen tells Autolycus and the other gentlemen that Paulina "hath privately twice or thrice a day, ever since the death of Hermione, visited that removed house" where all are going to see the statue unveiled (V.ii.110). Paulina herself tells everyone that they should "Prepare to see the life as lively mocked as ever / Still sleep mocked death" (V.iii.22-23). Editors frequently gloss "mocked" as "imitated," but the first definition in the OED is "to deceive or impose upon; to delude, befool; to tantalize, disappoint."²⁶⁴ Seeing Paulina as a Harrowing Christ makes it possible to view her concealment of Hermione as another form of magic. Rather

²⁶³ Jensen, "Singing Psalms to Horn-Pipes.," 279-306 and Lupton, 216.

²⁶⁴ "mock, v.". OED Online. December 2013. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/120530?rskey=N4g7hI&result=8&isAdvanced=false> (accessed February 10, 2014).

than seeing science as uncovering “truth” and discrediting superstitious religion, this lens gives us the opportunity to see magic, science, and religion as actively producing the truth necessary for social order and political stability because the Christ that appears in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and the subsequent Harrowing texts performs science, magic, and religious ritual consecutively and recursively.

As we have seen with Archimago’s creation and Faustus’s attempts to fool Lucifer, the indications of trickery which Lupton would describe as emphasis on “the fact of cancellation,” may also be profitably read as harrowing actions because the Harrowing Christ is he who beguiled the beguiler. In *Piers Plowman* and in the cycle plays, Christ’s entrance into hell and defeat of Satan is dependent upon an act of trickery. He hides his divinity under the cloak of manly flesh in order to convince Satan that he is a man like any other man who can be contained in hell. This is the “hook and bait” theory discussed in Chapter 2.²⁶⁵ In the Townley cycle, Christ admits this to Satan, saying, “My godhede here I hyd / In mary, moder myne, / where it shall neuer by kyd / to the ne none of thyne.”²⁶⁶ Thus in the Harrowing, Christ’s act of redemption relies on his ability to trick Satan into believing he is mortal when he is not. Paulina’s actions similarly rely on her ability to convince Leontes that Hermione is dead when she is alive or alive when she is dead. Hermione’s return and especially her forgiveness of Leontes is the miracle regardless of the method. If science is discovering the underlying causes of miraculous or

²⁶⁵ See discussion in Chapter 2, especially Marx, *The Devil’s Rights and the Redemption in the Literature of Medieval England*.

²⁶⁶ Rose, *The Wakefield Mystery Plays*, “Harrowing,” lines XXV.263-266

seemingly magical events, the texts that reinterpret the Harrowing of Hell suggest that this knowledge does not make the event itself any less magical or miraculous.

The choice of midwife as profession for the Christ-figure is highly relevant when looked at from the perspective of the interrelatedness of trickery and faith. As an early medical profession, midwifery gave Shakespeare the flexibility to bring together the seemingly disparate realms of science and faith. Paulina delivers both Perdita and Hermione to Leontes in order to preserve the family line. Her bravery and her actions are miraculous and redemptive throughout the play in part because she is able to work out the details unseen. Reading *The Winter's Tale* through the lens of the Harrowing of Hell shows that faith, trickery, and magic are interrelated for Shakespeare and his audience. Rather than viewing the possibilities of the final scene as either trickery or miracle, accepting Paulina's actions as both helps us to understand science and secularism as enchanted rather than disenchanted ways of looking at the world. For Shakespeare and theologians like Parkes and John Higin, accepting Christ's descent into hell served as the middle ground between the iconoclasm of Puritan reformers and a return to the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages. This tradition served to balance the Church of England between these opposing poles. In his recent collection of essays on science and religion, *The Accidental Universe: The World You Thought You Knew*, Alan Lightman writes, "Faith, in its broadest sense, is about far more than belief in the existence of God or the disregard of scientific evidence. Faith is the willingness to give ourselves over, at times, to things we do not fully understand...Faith is...the full engagement with this strange and

shimmering world.”²⁶⁷ Lightman’s description of faith as engagement reminds us of the active nature of perception and the creation of meaning. When Paulina cryptically tells the audience at the unveiling of her statue, “It is required / You do awake your faith” (V.iii.117-118), she does not spell out the full implications of her magic trick, but what becomes clear is that Hermione’s successful return to life is dependent upon the active acceptance of Paulina’s feat as miraculous. All the present Sicilians and Bohemians must fully engage with the “strange and shimmering” reunion of people long thought dead or mortal enemies in order to restore the kingdoms to stable operation. As O’Connell suggests, “the faith and complicity of the audience are also at stake.”²⁶⁸ Regardless of whether or not Paulina actually revives the statue or simply hides Hermione for sixteen years, Shakespeare’s final scene here shows that faith is an active rather than passive way of experiencing the world, a way of experiencing that creates the conditions necessary for magic and eventually science to exist.

Paulina presents a very different Christ-figure from Archimago, Night, or Faustus, but *The Winter’s Tale* also brings to life many of the same Harrowing of Hell themes on the stage. In the references to Apollo and the oracle, Shakespeare takes up Spenser’s concern with the classical past and integrates it without a sense of anxiety. In her ability to confront the monarch and his unjust systems, Paulina reworks Faustus’s legal negotiations. The use of a female Christ-figure may be surprising, but it also allows a

²⁶⁷ Alan Lightman, *The Accidental Universe* (New York: Random House LLC, 2014), 51-52.

²⁶⁸ O’Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye*, 142.

greater flexibility in the subject positions that can emulate Christ. Because the harrowing actions are not received via extensive education or travel, various subjects have access to the narrative and the power that narrative offers in dealing with demons. Furthermore midwifery's association with natural philosophy and science is further proof of the nexus of discourses the Harrowing brings together, which in turn provides women with agency of which men cannot conceive. Paulina's harrowing actions also begin to show the interrelatedness of religious, magical, and scientific discourse in the understanding of cosmic order in the early seventeenth century. By the end of the 1600s this interrelatedness has moved closer to conflation. In the next and final chapter, I investigate Margaret Cavendish's recreation of the Harrowing of Hell with another, even more politically and physically powerful, female Christ.

CHAPTER VI

“A THING NOT TO BE FORCED OR PRESSED UPON THE PEOPLE”:

CAVENDISH’S FEMALE CHRIST

But the Theologers would not allow that Opinion, and said, the Natural Philosophers were Atheists, whereupon the Natural Philosophers said, that the Theologers were Ignorant, and full of Fallacy and Sophistry...at last the Theologers and Philosophers became so Violent and Loud, as I did fear they would have Fought, if they had had any other Wounding Weapons than their Tongues.

—Margaret Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, Letter 74²⁶⁹

Scholars seem to avoid Cavendish’s view of religion altogether. Kate Lilley describes Cavendish’s oeuvre as “unusually secular” in her introduction to *The Blazing World*.²⁷⁰ Though she admits that Cavendish read and commented on the Bible, Lara Dodds maintains that “Cavendish’s references to reading in religious contexts are remarkably rare.”²⁷¹ These scholars note a perceived lack of religious content, but the vast majority of critics focus on the political or scientific aspects of Cavendish’s writings without mentioning religion at all. Scholars looking for mentions of religion and theology in Cavendish’s works, however, will find a plethora of material. As the epigraph suggests, theology and natural philosophy are intricately linked in Cavendish’s texts, and her work shows that strong and persuasive religious views are fundamental in creating a

²⁶⁹ Cavendish, Margaret, and James Fitzmaurice. “Sociable Letters 1664.” (1997): 74. 86-87.

²⁷⁰ Kate Lilley, “Introduction.” *The Blazing World and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), xi.

²⁷¹ Lara Dodds, *The Literary Invention of Margaret Cavendish* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2013), 31.

well-ordered society. In this section from the *Sociable Letters*, Cavendish bemoans the fact that theologians and natural philosophers will not communicate effectively and share their views. That both groups of educated people resort to name calling and yelling places them on an even playing field and patently refuses to place one above the other. Appropriate action and discourse, Cavendish suggests, would occur through cooperation and mutual respect between the two parties. That science (represented by the natural philosophers) and religion (represented by the theologians) should cooperate with rather than antagonize each other seems both important to Cavendish's philosophy on the whole and largely ignored in the criticism of her work. In this chapter, I contend that religion is central to *The Blazing World* and that Cavendish enters into and resolves theological and scientific debate through narrative. We have seen that the literary reinterpretations of the Harrowing of Hell and the theological debates over Christ's descent are a nexus of the discourses of magic, religion, and science in the period and that the Harrowing of Hell is a provocative lens for understanding positive representations of magic as interdependent with ritualization of Christ's actions and the individual's sense of agency over his or her fate in this world and in the afterlife. Cavendish engages in this tradition by emphasizing the typological relationships at work in the Creation, the Harrowing of Hell, and the Last Judgment and presenting the Empress of the Blazing world as a Christ-figure who performs harrowing actions similar to Faustus and Paulina. Moreover, Cavendish adds her character's involvement with science and religion through a kind of affective piety that privileges the imagination as the site of action and an exciting retelling of the

Harrowing through militaristic and technological conquest that changes what it means for a Christ-figure to beguile the beguiler.

In the previous chapters, I have argued that Spenser, Marlowe, and Shakespeare draw on the character of Christ in the Harrowing of Hell texts to imbue their characters with supernatural agency over antagonistic forces, and ultimately over their own spiritual fate. Ritualizing Christ's supernatural agency continually blurs the lines between religion, magic, and science in these late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century texts in ways that trouble our scholarly historical narrative. Spenser highlights this anxiety most explicitly by multiplying the harrowings performed by otherwise villainous characters within the larger narrative of Redcrosse's harrowing of the dragon. However, Faustus's negotiations with Mephistopheles and Lucifer and Paulina's rebellious confrontation with Leontes are hardly presented in a straightforwardly positive manner. The juridical rhetoric that Faustus uses to harrow Mephistopheles and Lucifer is perfectly appropriate for Christ in the Harrowing but complicates the reading of this ambitious magician as a reprobate. Likewise, the association of Paulina with the natural philosophy of the midwife *and* the power of a saint confounds our ability to readily dismiss her as a harmless old woman. The anxiety over the performance of magic and the attending witch hunts all but disappears by the end of the seventeenth century. Though scholars have posited a variety of reasons for this, I argue that the discourses of religion and magic appropriate the emerging scientific discourse in a way that makes the ultimate causes and

effects of all three indistinguishable.²⁷² In *The Blazing World*, Margaret Cavendish fashions her Empress as a figure of Christ by associating her with the female hagiography tradition before having her harrow her world of the hell of political instability. The Empress uses intra-species communication and a natural philosophy that borders on the technological in order to intervene in the physical and spiritual fates of her world.

In previous Harrowing reinterpretations, there is a tension between magic as a threat to the social order and magic as constituting that social order. For Cavendish the association with sorcery that was simultaneously threatening and absolutely necessary is different than it is for Spenser, Marlowe, or even Shakespeare. This change is clear when we compare Cavendish's category of magicians to the sorcerers we have already met; the spider-men the Empress meets when she surveys the societies of her new world are not even potentially threatening in the way that Archimago, Faustus, and Paulina are. The

²⁷² James Sharpe implies in *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* that modernizing (knowledge) is the reason for the decline in witchcraft. "A number of other European states were similarly showing an increased scepticism about witchcraft by this time... There was every indication that by the 1630s in England, as in France, and / countries such as Spain and the Dutch Republic where witch-hunting had never taken hold, both lay and clerical authorities were very much marginalising witchcraft, and relegating it to the world of popular beliefs and superstitions" (30-31). Malcom Gaskill writes in *Witchfinders* that "This shift in opinion was driven by jurisprudential separation of 'matters of fact' from 'matters of law', but also mirrored a growing tendency among theologians to scrutinize occult phenomena more closely... The final outcome would be 'a declining sense of the miraculous' in the Western world, perhaps even 'the disenchantment of the world'. There were also humanitarian undertones to these changes in thinking" (280). In *Reading Witchcraft*, Marion Gibson notes that the "loss of interest may have been, paradoxically, a result of too much interest in controversial forms of witchcraft, and forbidden forms of writing about it. Earlier writers began by discussing God, Pliny or their patron, secure in the knowledge that their genre was mainstream, safe, approved of. By the later Jacobean period this assurance has disappeared, and witchcraft pamphlets disappear with it" (190). Throughout this dissertation, but especially in this chapter, I take issue with this teleological narrative of progress that indicates that magic and religion die in order for more intellectually appropriate science to be born. I argue instead that for the early modern subject, science *was* miraculous and magical in a way that further confirmed belief in God and his omnipotence. Rather than slowly bringing the light of knowledge to the believers that results in our modern versions of atheism, explorations into the causes of events resulted in a *further enchantment* with God's power and the intricate workings of his creation.

anxiety present in Spenser and Marlowe that is transformed in Shakespeare is almost argued against in Cavendish. When the Empress first enters the Blazing World and meets its inhabitants, she discloses her appreciation for magicians. When she meets the spider-men, she is in awe of their many abilities:

The mathematicians were in great esteem with the Empress, as being not only the chief tutors and instructors in many arts, but some of them excellent magicians and informers of spirits, which was the reason their characters were so abstruse and intricate, that the Empress knew not what to make of them. (159)

The Empress holds the spider-men in high esteem because of their teaching ability and because of their magical talents. Cavendish does not go into detail about the feats of magic that these subjects perform, but it is clear that they are being presented in a positive light. Given the fact that many of the societies are brought under suspicion and a few are either disbanded or threatened with being disbanded, the unproblematic nature of the mathematicians/magicians is notable. Obviously the discourse of magic does not threaten the order of the Blazing World as much as rhetoric or inconclusive scientific findings.

By the end of the seventeenth century, science begins to become a substitute for the ritual the Harrowing provides in that it emphasizes man's power in the world. In "The New Atlantis," Francis Bacon argues that philosophers need to break away from tradition and create entirely new ways of interacting with the world, but he does this in the context of a religious society that respects God's power in creation. He concludes by saying a prayer to God and then turning his attention to men to admonish them:

My first admonition (which was also my prayer) is that men confine the sense within the limits of duty in respect to things divine; for the sense is like the sun, which reveals the face of earth, but seals and shuts up the face of heaven. My next, that in flying from this evil they fall not into the opposite error, which they will surely do if they think that the inquisition of nature is in any part interdicted or forbidden...I am labouring to lay the foundation, not of any sect or doctrine, but of human utility and power.²⁷³

Bacon's form of science is in no way a work against God's order; instead, he sees his inquisitions into nature as fulfilling God's purpose for man in the world. Cavendish's work is an excellent starting place for looking at the interrelatedness of scientific discourse and literary work because it defies genre expectations in ways that have resulted in disparaging comments about the quality of her text.²⁷⁴ In order to understand the brilliant ways that Cavendish's work intervenes in theological and scientific debates of the time, it is necessary to see the way those theological and scientific debates operated. It has been quite common to note the influences of scientific discourse on Cavendish's work; however, we have largely disregarded her thoughts on religion despite their central position in *The Blazing World* and the important ways that religious ideas and fantasy are related through ritual. Dismissing Cavendish's focus on fantasy is closely related to dismissing the religious aspects of her texts; fantasy is her affective piety, her way of reimagining and rewriting cultural materials in order to change social and spiritual hierarchies in the present moment. For Cavendish, fantasy becomes the way that we

²⁷³ Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis and The Great Instauration*. Jerry Weingberger, Ed. (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1989), 15-16.

²⁷⁴ Both Katherine Kellett and Rachel Trubowitz have noted that criticism of Cavendish's work focuses on the confusion of genres. See Katherine R. Kellett, "Performance, Performativity, and Identity in Margaret Cavendish's 'The Convent of Pleasure'." *Studies in English Literature* 48, no. 2 (2008): 419-442. and Rachel Trubowitz, "The Reenchantment of Utopia and the Female Monarchical Self: Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 11, no. 2 (1992): 229-245.

create and maintain the relationship between the seen and unseen in order to harness supernatural agency to accomplish feats in the mundane world.

As they are in affective piety and ritualization, thinking, reading, writing, and acting are all intimately connected for Cavendish. In her texts, Cavendish represents the intellectual process from inception to manifestation on several occasions. In each, the process begins with imagining and thinking. Gabrielle Starr points out, “For Cavendish, fancy is an epistemic tool, because the frontiers of knowledge are subject to imaginative vision alone.”²⁷⁵ But this understanding of the process as beginning with imagination does not preclude physical action as the end result. In fact, thoughts can be material for Cavendish. The most important aspect of working through problems is coming up with an active solution that supports the harmony of social order. Starr continues:

Cavendish’s conception of the material existence of cognitive powers and acts puts her on a radical fringe in relation to her contemporaries in natural philosophy, but one ought not thus dismiss her: not only does neuroscience now contend that cognition is material, but her insistence on materiality enables her to theorize form and imagination in new ways. (299)

For Starr the philosophical implications of Cavendish’s materiality are of paramount importance, but the emphasis on imagination and physicality has theological implications as well. In the Introduction and in Chapter 2, I discuss Catherine Bell’s conception of ritualization as thoughtful action that changes social situations by aligning oneself with a perceived cosmic order. Throughout her text, Cavendish imbues her Empress with the

²⁷⁵ Gabrielle Starr, “Cavendish, Aesthetics, and the Anti-Platonic Line.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, no. 3 (2006): 295-308. 298.

capability to create a religion and social order by depicting the reorganization of the Blazing World and subsequent harrowing of the Empress's homeland through the typological connection of the Creation, Harrowing of Hell, and Last Judgment. These emphases on ritualization and religious tradition show that though Cavendish was a staunch royalist and an advocate for the Church of England, she preferred sensual religious practices and believed in the necessity of physical interaction with the supernatural realm.²⁷⁶ Because the Harrowing of Hell is a remaking, a renegotiation, of the cosmic order between the Creation and the Last Judgment, it provides an excellent lens through which to view Cavendish's reorganization of the political and social climate in the midst of the crisis of the Civil Wars. Throughout her text she presents the world from which she came as so mired in political conflict to be hellish or apocalyptic, but rather than give up hope and argue that it is indeed the end of the world, Cavendish offers hope. The Harrowing provides a context for this hope because it is the moment of spiritual reckoning that allows mankind to continue to attempt to create a righteous world on earth rather than the final moment, the Last Judgment, which renegotiates but immediately ends the world as mankind knows it.

The Harrowing of Hell survived the doctrinal and sectarian climate of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by providing a way of ritualizing even the contemplative actions of affective piety. Ritualization of Christ's actions in fiction and explanation of them in debate helped to mitigate the anxiety about the most extreme

²⁷⁶ For more information about Cavendish's politics see Anne Elizabeth Carson, "The Hunted Stag and the Beheaded King." *Studies in English Literature* 45, no. 3 (2005): 537-556.

views of predestination and the loss of human agency in determining one's fate in the afterlife. Spenser, Marlowe, and Shakespeare all confront the logical concerns with extreme Protestantism's focus on predestination and iconoclasm in their texts, and they eventually decide on a more moderate position through their reimaginings of the harrowing. The doctrine of predestination becomes less of an issue for the Church of England over time, and man's ability or inability to participate in and affect the social order on earth becomes more of an issue. A main controversy during the mid- to late-seventeenth century was conformity to the state and church versus religious freedom and tolerance. During and after the Civil War, Puritans like John Bunyan defend the extreme Protestant view of predestination but emphasize human action as a central part of that cosmology. In the author's apology predated to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan writes, "This book will make a Traveller of thee, If by its Counsel thou wilt ruled be; It will direct thee to the Holy Land, If thou wilt its Directions understand: Yea, it will make the sloathful, active be; The Blind also, delightful things to see."²⁷⁷ Bunyan suggests that the reason that this new narrative is useful in its exegesis and understanding of the New Testament is that reading and becoming involved in the story leads to a kind of action. This kind of action, essentially the affective piety turned supernatural agency, is like work and pilgrimage in its spiritual effectiveness and its ability to bring about miracle. Bunyan's apology shows that even staunch Puritans emphasized an active faith, so much so that despite the tendency of English Puritan theologians to dismiss the Harrowing in debates, Bunyan incorporates a Harrowing-like confrontation into his own text. On his

²⁷⁷ Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Ed. W. R. Owens. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 8.

way to the City of Zion, Christian, Bunyan's Everyman, meets with Apollyon, a dragon-like manifestation of Satan, and they debate over who has the right to Christian's loyalty and obedience. Christian harrows Apollyon of his rights through a specifically political rhetoric about the relationship of man to earthly powers:

I was born indeed in your Dominions, but your service was hard, and your wages such as a man could not live on, *for the wages of Sin is death*; therefore when I was come to years, I did as other considerate persons do, look out, if perhaps I might mend my self...I have let my self to another, even to the King of Princes.²⁷⁸

Christian's arguments against Apollyon's rights remind us of Faustus's arguments with Mephistopheles, but they change the context slightly in order to encompass an implicit debate against worldly allegiances as well. Bunyan uses Christian's brief harrowing to insist that man cannot actually serve a king on earth and a king in heaven at the same time. Cavendish does not support individual freedom above political and religious conformity in any way, using her reinterpretation of the Harrowing to support top-down social order in her *Blazing World*. Though in both cases the author writes a character who achieves a new world where he or she is compensated for the hard work of understanding the cosmic order, Cavendish's retelling of the Harrowing of Hell sees the freedom of religion as leading to factions and serious disputes that become the hellish landscape the Empress needs to confront and defeat. Though Bunyan and Cavendish are on opposite sides of the political spectrum of mid- to late- seventeenth-century England, they both

²⁷⁸ Ibid, 57.

maintain through their work that reimagining the Harrowing of Hell could have productive effects on the understanding of human agency and place in society.

In this final chapter, I first explain the forces that change how the debates over Christ's descent into hell are argued in the later part of the seventeenth century. I then explain how Cavendish intervenes in this debate by creating a saint-like Empress of her new world who works with spirits to discover and fashion the world around her. As the central part of the larger narrative of the relationship between God, mankind, and Satan, the Harrowing of Hell changes from the Old Testament law enacted through the Fall to the more generous New Testament law that emphasizes love and charity. Throughout *The Blazing World*, Cavendish represents the Empress as working within this moment to change the way religion is conceived in her utopian society. I examine how this Empress returns to her own world to defend her King who is besieged by rebels. Finally, I conclude the dissertation by arguing that there is a recursive relationship between the theological arguments about Christ's descent, the literature that reimagines that descent, and the prevailing views on magic, religion, and science in the period.

Christ and the Chemists

The character of theological debates in general, and certainly the debate over Christ's descent specifically, changes during the seventeenth century because of increasing divisions within the Protestants of the Church of England. By this I mean that the radical Protestants begin to grow powerful enough in England to threaten the moderate stance Elizabeth, James, and the emerging Anglican Church try so hard to

maintain through 1625. By the end of the seventeenth century, English participation in the debate over Christ's descent had slowed considerably. I contend that this is a result of increasing political (and by extension bodily) threat to all those who chose to "interpret" the articles in any way. In 1628 William Laud drew up "His Majesty's Declaration" or "The Royal Declaration" issued by Charles I in order to quash doctrinal differences. The Declaration reads:

We will, that all further curious search be laid aside, and these disputes shut up in God's promises, as they be generally set forth to us in the holy Scriptures, and the general meaning of the Articles of the Church of England according to them. And that no man hereafter shall either print, or preach, to draw the Article aside any way, but shall submit to it in the plain and full meaning thereof: and shall not put his own sense or comment to be the meaning of the Article, but shall take it in the literal and grammatical sense (qtd in *Essays and Reviews: The 1860 Text and Its Reading*, 808).

Whatever the reaction was to Charles I's declaration in the pulpits, obedience seemed to follow in print, at least regarding the third article. Ellayne Fowler has pointed out that both the Duke and Duchess of Newcastle wrote that theological controversy was dangerous for the state and that debate should be completely disallowed.²⁷⁹ Very few entries into the debate appear after this time, and the ones that do rely heavily on the pre-

²⁷⁹ Ellayne Fowler, "Margaret Cavendish and the Ideal Commonwealth." *Utopian Studies* 7, no. 1 (1996): 38-48. 40. Fowler points out: "Disharmony in politics and religion had led to the years of civil war. For the royalist Duke of Newcastle, harmony could only be achieved through orthodoxy, particularly in the church. Here again the rule of one person, the king, is paramount. Newcastle sees both Catholicism and Presbyterianism as antimonarchical as they set up counter authorities to the king. Newcastle goes on to enumerate measures that would ensure orthodoxy and counter disharmony and sedition...Bishops should be chosen from wise men not scholars and should ensure the orthodoxy of religious teaching in schools. Newcastle goes even further by insisting that the clergy preach only those sermons approved and distributed by the bishops...Cavendish includes some similar proposals in the laws and decrees of her commonwealth. Clergy should be chosen because they are honest rather than scholarly. She also states, 'that no Divine shall study controversies, or at least not dispute' (404), because this leads to the smothering of faith" (40).

1628 arguments and continually state that they are not interpreting the article. The two entries into the debate that I examine in this chapter are fifty years apart; however, they demonstrate the interweaving of scientific, religious, and magical discourse in profitable ways. In fact, they show how these particular theologians use scientific discourse to interpret the article without debating the theological aspects, which are presented as indisputable. Cavendish and her husband may both have stated that theological debate is bad for the social order, but Cavendish found the debates interesting enough to work through both in her letters and in *The Blazing World*.

Though Charles I had decreed that the articles were not open to interpretation in 1628, thirteen years later, Richard Bernard, Pastor of the Church at Batcombe, published “The Article of Christs Descension into Hell, Fully in the True Sense Thereof Layd Open” (1641).²⁸⁰ His piece on the descent was written and published late in a long and prolific career dotted with accusations of non-conformity and sympathy for separatists, but it both references and follows the work of Thomas Bilson, Church of England theologian and friend to Elizabeth I discussed in Chapter 3 in the context of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*. Bernard took risks in publishing about an article, but he is careful to maintain that he does not interpret but rather explains simply what is clearly already true. Unlike many of the reformers mentioned in previous chapters, Bernard’s text does not deny the descent or Christ’s triumph over Satan; he is not in any way radical in this case. Though he spent at least part of his career concerned with the activities of English

²⁸⁰ Richard Bernard, *The Article of Christs Descension into Hell Fully in the True Sense Thereof Layd Open / by Richard Bernard*. Early English Books, 1641-1700 / 121:08. (London: Printed by Jo. Beale for Thomas Underhill, 1641).

Catholics, his text opens up possibilities for literal descent and alternatives to Purgatory rather than following Luther or Calvin in their efforts to turn this part of the creed into a metaphor for Christ's suffering on the cross. His conclusion indicates that though there is no scriptural basis for the descent, we must accept it as a possibility because it is in the creed:

We have no warrant in the word of God, so to fasten Christs soule unto Hell, for the time of his death, that it might not be in Paradise, before it descended into Hell, and he first shew himself to the Saints, to their unspeakable comfort, before he went to subject the power of darkenesse under his yoake. That he descended into the deep must be received, because it is avouched by the Apostle; but what time he went or how long he stayed, as also what manner of triumph he brought thence, it cannot be limited by any mortall man, nor dare I determine it, lest I should avert you from truth to fables. (F4r)

By the end of his argument, Bernard shows himself not to be laying open the true sense of the article as he claims in his title; he basically says that no one knows when Christ descended or what he did in hell. He instead reaffirms the likeness of Christ's journey with the journey of the elect and rearranges the understanding of the physical cosmos in relation to new understandings of the physical world.

Thus Bernard follows other seventeenth-century theologians in increasing the separation between the Church of England and the radical reformers, even when this doctrinal view risks sympathy with the Catholics. However, his text is especially interesting not where it looks backwards but where his theology illustrates the emerging scientific concerns of the seventeenth century. Bernard's text shows increasing concerns with geography and where hell might be located that reflect the wider concerns of

exploration and expansion. He insists that Christ's soul ascended to heaven before it went to hell to subjugate Satan because hell is actually above the earth:

Christ speaks of Satan, as not having habitation below, but rather above, agreeing with that in [Ephesians 6.12] speaking of high or heavenly places, for he faith, he saw Satan falling from Heaven like lightening, [Luke 10.18]. Therefore to urge a sense upon the Article in conceit of Hell to be below, which hath more probability to bee above the earth, is too weake a ground. (D1r-D1v)

The focus on geography and the wheres of hell and heaven and dead souls seems more logical viewed in the context of the increasing exploration of new worlds on the earth. Speaking of the mid-seventeenth century conversation on the possibility of traveling to the moon, David Cressy writes:

These works, along with the literary, cosmological, and religious treatises that preceded them, and the disputations, entertainments, and translations that followed, were inspired both by the geographical discoveries of the age of Columbus and by the heliocentric discourse of the Copernican revolution. They were also energized by the soteriological concerns of Christianity, refracted and intensified by the Reformation. They raised important questions about humanity's location within the universe, and the interplay of science and the imagination with the truths of revealed religion.²⁸¹

Cressy here notes the ways that new scientific understandings affected the discourses of religion and magic or alchemical practice. These contributions to the debate over Christ's descent prove Cressy's point that scientific epistemology was quickly and virtually seamlessly interwoven into theological debate. Bernard also notes that the center of the earth is not nearly large enough to hold the huge numbers of damned souls, highlighting

²⁸¹ David Cressy, "Early Modern Space Travel and the English Man in the Moon." *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 4 (2006): 961-982, 962.

the understanding of the earth as circular and as having a finite mass and space on which or in which to live (D1r). That a new understanding of the physical world necessitates new understandings in theology is not as surprising as the ways that these new possibilities provide alternatives to both Church of England and Catholic understandings of the afterlife.

Where late sixteenth-century texts argued vociferously over the definitions of words, insisting on a single location for hell in order to avoid accusations of reviving the Catholic Purgatory, Bernard's text mentions Hades as a place both separate from earth and hell. For Bernard, this space is a holding space for bodies and souls who will be resurrected at the Last Judgment: "For Hades is the continuation of the body and soule in this state of separation from the time of death, and of the body lying in the grave, till the day of the resurrection, in which space the dead is held under conquest, and deaths dominion over those in the grave, which to be in Hades" (D3r). In this passage, Bernard, like Spenser, Broughton, and Bilson in Chapter 3, returns to the texts of the ancients, but not of the Church fathers as other theologians have done. For him, the Hades of ancient Greece provides an alternative state to Purgatory in a new understanding of the cosmic timeline. Whereas the medieval Catholic Church encouraged belief in Purgatory as a place of purging sin before entering heaven and belief in both heaven and hell as final and permanent destinations, the eschatological logic of the Protestant faith encouraged a belief in resurrection of the human body and soul that occurs at the Last Judgment, a belief which in essence, displaces the Harrowing to the end of time rather than making it central to the crucifixion. Unlike Purgatory, however, Hades was a holding space for the

body only. The souls of the elect automatically go to heaven directly after death. As is argued by Christopher Carlile as early as the 1550s, God leaves no elect soul in hell at any time. All the souls of the patriarchs and the righteous believers are in heaven. If all the souls of the elect go directly to heaven and hell is a place of eternal damnation never to be reprieved, why would Christ descend into hell? Rather than discuss the possible conquest, which is the primary answer for Adam Hill in his response to Carlile, Bernard and William Allen (discussed below) change the geography in order to have Christ guide souls without bodies and resurrect bodies to be with souls in the eternal life after the apocalypse. In these later debates, accounting for new scientific knowledge about the immaterial soul, the transmigration of souls, and the geography of the world becomes equally important to navigating how the Catholic Church fathers influence the newly formed Church of England.

Over the course of the century the theological debate takes a very scientific turn. On Easter in 1697, William Allen preached a sermon he titled “A Practical Improvement of the Article of Christ’s descent into hell and Rising Again from the Dead in a Sermon.”²⁸² Even the title suggests a change in the entire concept. Here we have the practical answer to our theological questions rather than a theological or even emotional answer. Though Allen’s sermon was written thirty years after *The Blazing World* was published, Allen’s remarkable explanation of the descent is closely related to Cavendish’s comingling of scientific concepts with ones a modern audience would associate only with

²⁸² William Allen, *A Practical Improvement of the Articles of Christ's Descent into Hell and Rising Again from the Dead in a Sermon, Preach'd in the Parish Church of Bridgewater, on Easter-Day, Anno Domini, 1697 / by William Allen*. Early English Books, 1641-1700 / 482:05. (London : Printed for J. Taylor and J. Miller, 1697).

fantasy, fiction, or theology. As it was for Adam Hill and Christopher Carlile, the separation of the soul from the body and what happens to each is extremely important for Allen. The contribution to the debate that comes at the end of the seventeenth century reverses the important movement in the late sixteenth century however. For Hill and Carlile, the movement was away from the body and physical confrontation and toward the idea that Christ descended into hell in order to preach his dominion over Satan. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, Hill considers the separation of the body and the soul important because it defines death and the reknitting defines resurrection. By the end of the seventeenth century the questions concerning what happens to the body when it decays and how Christians will be reunited with their bodies at the Last Judgment become more important than internalizing religious experience. Throughout his text, Allen associates Christ's descent with the idea that there is a space below our earth that stores bodies until the resurrection. If early texts on Christ's descent show a movement away from the body to the verbal and mental, later contributions reverse this movement from the ethereal toward the physical. I contend this is because of the emerging emphasis on scientific discourse and empirical inquiry typified by Francis Bacon and the new Royal Society.

Allen argues that Christ's soul was nowhere near hell in the sense that the English have come to know it. He writes, "he came not near that Abyss, nor was at all among those Reprobated Crew" (B2r). Instead, like Bernard, Allen writes that Jesus went to Hades to retrieve his body and to guide others on the way to retrieve their bodies. Christ's feat in descending into Hades was to show how immortality works: "Our Saviour's return

to re-assume his Body, gave an Ocular demonstration of the Immortality both of Body and Soul. The Immortality of the Soul was not so much question'd; but that of the Body, and the Resurrection of that, was ridicul'd" (B4r). This journey and movement is important because all the Elect will one day be reunited with their bodies at the Last Judgment: "their scatter'd Atoms shall be recalled to make up the whole compositum, Body and Soul; and as Men in Bodies they shall ever be with the Lord" (B4v). For Allen, the triumph of death would be the eternal separation of the body from the soul, but this resurrection is not a power given to Christ alone; instead, all of humanity will one day rise from the dead and return to their bodies to live in Paradise with Christ and God the Father. The third article is then meant to speak a very different kind of comfort than it did in the literary tradition of the Middle Ages. Christ defeats death and Satan only by reversing the natural order of those forces. Instead of trafficking with demons like a magician and arguing for the souls of the righteous, Christ is a scientist who reverses the order of physical decomposition. The comfort to the Elect is that they will once again be reunited with their bodies in the hereafter.

Comfort is the major motivation behind a clear understanding of the article for both Bernard and Allen. Believers should not question the article or be discomfited by some unknown power of hell because God's power is so great that it can overcome natural law and death. Allen explains:

But the true and brighter side of the Article, is to encourage, comfort, and confirm the Spirits of the Righteous with hopes of a greater and farther glorification, and of a nearer approach to the Eternal Majesty, when he shall come again to give up

the Kingdom unto the Father, when he and they shall ever be with the Lord. (C1r-C1v)

Comfort should be taken from an understanding of the ultimate power of God. Triumph and power are still emphasized in this sense, but the powers are different, and the believers' relationships to the powers are different. For Allen, his audience will participate in the triumph over death by moving in spirit to the body. He writes:

You shall, as your Redeemer's Soul, go into Paradise; but that is not your Eternal Rest. It is a Mansion, but not the Everlasting Kingdom that is yet to come, and Christ will come to carry all and every of you, both Body and Soul, into the Kingdom prepared for you. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. (C2r)

Allen's interpretation of the article provides for the Elect exactly what Faustus asks for at the end of Marlowe's play: a second Harrowing. In this narrative, Christ's descent is simply a preview for the action of Revelations in which he will once again come to lead the bodies of the dead to their spirits for resurrection to eternal life. Christ is our navigator in the complicated afterworld that includes a heaven, a Paradise, a Hades, a hell, and presumably earth. While the timing has changed, it is important to note that the thematic elements of the Harrowing have not. Christ triumphs over death in order to save souls. Throughout the texts discussed in this dissertation the method of achieving success vacillates between verbal, martial, and supernatural displays of power, but in all these cases, the character of Christ is one imbued with a tremendous amount of agency over his surroundings no matter where he is.

In order to defend the idea that Christ's descent is important because of its relationship to the Last Judgment and the reuniting of Christian souls with their bodies, Allen does not turn to church history, the writings of the patriarchs, or even scripture; instead, he brings in new developments in science to support his point:

The Chemists tell us for certain, that the Particles of a resolv'd Body may retain their own Nature under various alterations, and disguises, of which it is possible they may be stript, and that without making a Humane Body cease to be the same; it may be repaired, and augmented, by the adaptation of congruously disposed Matter: Which Philosophy solves the difficulty of the loss of Body into Earth, and from thence to Grass, and from Grass, to Chyle in the Ox or the Sheep's Belly, and from thence into food again for Man; so that thro' a successive Transmigration, the Body of Man becomes that of another. But why should it be thought impossible that a most intelligent Agent, whose Omnipotence extends to all that is not contradictory to the nature of things, or of his own, should be able to order and watch the Particles of a Humane Body, as that a compleat number may be preserv'd, and retriev'd; so that stripping them of their disguises, or extricating them from other parts of Matter, to which they may happen to be conjoyn'd he may re-unite them betwixt themselves, and if need be, with Particles of Matter fit to be contexted with them; which being united with the former Soul, may in a sense consonant to the Expressions of Scripture, re-compose the same Man whose Soul and Body were formerly dejoin'd by Death. (D3v-D4r)

In this remarkable passage, Allen goes not to tradition but to new scientific understandings of the way matter changes in various states to show that the descent is a necessary component of the Last Judgment where human souls and bodies will be reunited in heaven forever. In Chapter 2, Christ was shown to be a ritual master in whose body the schemes for changing social situations exist. Here in Allen's text we see a new understanding of this ritualization where that ritual mastery is extended from Christ's body to bodies of all creation. The transformation from death to food to sustenance does not refer explicitly to the Eucharistic transformation of Christ's body but to the human

body as it goes from grass to sheep's food to man's food to man once again. Furthermore, the emphasis on "nature under various...disguises" is reminiscent of Christ's use of the disguise of humanity to descent and trick Satan into letting him into hell, but once again the magical power is disseminated to all men and women through scientific understanding of nature. Finally, the characterization of Christ here shows the emerging emphasis on scientific discourse in the period by describing him as "a most intelligent Agent" who can "in a sense consonant to the Expressions of Scripture" recombine the particles of a decomposed man into a living body once again.

The geographical and chemical emphases of these theological debates complicate our understanding of scientific discourse as emerging distinct from religious discourse and antithetical to magic. What we see in Bernard's insistence that the supernatural realm may also be more complex and various in its geography just as earth has proven to be and in Allen's contention that human beings have access to the miracles of scientific transformation in the same way that Christ did is that theology and religion appropriated and deployed scientific theories as evidence of God's intervention in human affairs and the continued interaction between God and man on the earth. It is no surprise then that the Harrowing of Hell, as the climactic moment in the contractual relationship between God, mankind (through Adam), Satan, and Christ, is presented as a miracle of the quasi-scientific ability to recreate man and place him in a different place in the cosmic order. In her retelling of the Harrowing of Hell narrative, Cavendish enters into this conversation by making her Christ-figure, the Empress, a "most intelligent Agent" who has the ability to *recreate* social order in service of the cosmic order through the harrowing actions of

inquiry (which replaces debate), affective experience, and military-technological defeat of political evil. In doing so, she argues for a single state religion and a social order that aligns with those religious views.

Margaret the First: Cavendish and Hagiography

The divinity of Cavendish's female Christ is emphasized throughout her text. She explains on multiple occasions that the reaction to the Empress in the world from which she came is mixed admiration and fear. As Rachel Trubowitz points out, Cavendish emphasizes the association with Christ in the actual harrowing battle by having her walk on water: "Cavendish goes so far as to depict [the Empress] as a kind of female Christ: carried above the ocean on the heads and backs of her Fish-men."²⁸³ And this is further emphasized by the reaction of the people who see her feat: "all kneeled down before her, and worshipped her with all submission and reverence" (210). Later, the countrymen who see her "cried out with one voice, that she was an angel sent from God to deliver them out of the hands of their enemies" (211). These reactions solidify an impression that the Empress is a deity and that her actions, though based on scientific knowledge, perform a kind of magic in inspiring the necessary humility and submission from those who see them. These reactions are not unanimous, however, and there is still a contingent of subjects who are unsettled by the inexplicable power this woman displays. Cavendish describes this group emphatically:

²⁸³ Trubowitz, 234.

But, good Lord! what several opinions and judgements did this produce in the minds of her country-men; some said she was an angel; others, she was a sorceress; some believed her a goddess; others said the devil deluded them in the shape of a fine lady (211).

Cavendish's description of this reaction shows that the same evidence can be used to come to many conclusions about character. Just as the Jews and Pilate disagree about who Jesus is in the trials discussed in Chapter 1, these men cannot agree on how they should view the Empress of the Blazing World who is come to rid their world of factionalism. The Christ figure is liminal and dangerous in her power to overcome enemies. Like Christ, the Empress is accused of sorcery and colluding with the devil by those who are afraid of the power she displays.

As Shakespeare does with Paulina in *The Winter's Tale*, Margaret Cavendish identifies herself as a writer and her protagonist, the Empress, with a tradition of female saints and miracles. In her "To the Reader," she writes:

I am not covetous, but as ambitious as ever any of my sex was, is, or can be; which makes, that though I cannot be *Henry* the Fifth, or *Charles* the Second, yet I endeavour to be *Margaret* the *First*; and although I have neither power, time nor occasion to conquer the world as *Alexander* or *Caesar* did; yet rather than not to be mistress of one, since Fortune and the Fates would give me none, I have made a world of my own (124).

Margaret here identifies herself with one of England's most iconic kings and the current monarch, both of which are political rather than religious figures; however, since 1534, the monarch of England and the head of the Church of England are one in the same. The religious reference undergirds the political one. As discussed in Chapter 3 regarding

Adam Hill's use of hagiography to make Christ's descent into hell acceptable to early modern English audiences, Alison Chapman argues that earthly patrons could be associated with saints to highlight their intercessory role between ordinary men and women and the source of political, social, financial, and spiritual power. Chapman primarily focuses on the way that literary figures use these correspondences to question how social structure and indebtedness works and she notes that the associations become increasingly problematic as the political and military power is centralized. In *The Winter's Tale* and in *The Blazing World*, pseudo-hagiography is employed not only as panegyric but as a way of depicting female agency and self-promotion.²⁸⁴ While neither text is free from complications or potential social problems, in both cases, females associated with saints are climbing the "larger social or spiritual ladder" Chapman describes. For Paulina, Leontes's accusations of witchcraft and association with Margaret of Antioch promote her from lady in waiting to Hermione, to counselor to Leontes, and eventually to spiritual guide and defender of the faith. The initial association with "lady Margery" may seem like a degrading reference, but it evolves throughout the story into an association with Saint Margaret and eventually to an association with Christ.

Similarly, in *The Blazing World*, Margaret Cavendish begins by associating herself with both an iconic (and saintly) King of England and the current King, but insists the association is not politically dangerous by stating, "I have made a world of my own:

²⁸⁴ For another argument about connections between Cavendish and *The Winter's Tale*, see Alexandra G. Bennett, "Testifying in the Court of Public Opinion: Margaret Cavendish Reworks *The Winter's Tale*" in *Cavendish and Shakespeare: interconnections*. Romack, Katherine, and James Fitzmaurice, eds. (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2006). Bennett's book chapter does not deal with *The Blazing World* specifically, and her focus is on women defending themselves in courtroom scenes.

for which no body, I hope, will blame me, since it is in every one's power to do the like" (124). After denigrating fancy as less than reason, the interjection of her desire to rule over an entire world seems safely couched in the realm of fictitious self-gratification rather than true political ambition. Cavendish further hides her own ambition by creating an Empress for her Blazing World rather than fashion herself as that Empress, but by placing the Empress immediately into the care of God and associating her with hagiographic traditions, she subtly draws on cosmic power to create a sense of agency for her protagonist. This association begins in the opening pages of the text when the Empress (at this time simply a "young Lady") is kidnapped by a lascivious merchant on a boat. The reader quickly realizes that Cavendish's Lady has powerful protection since the boat on which she resides is carried quickly to a place where none of the crew can survive. The fact that the boat takes the lady from one world into another likens her to the boundary-crossing, liminal Christ of the Harrowing of Hell as discussed in Chapter 1 as well. Cavendish explains that heaven intervenes directly on the Lady's behalf: "Heaven frowning at his theft, raised such a tempest, as they knew not what to do, or whither to steer their course...by assistance and favour of the Gods to this virtuous Lady, so turn and wind through those precipices, as if it had been guided by some experienced pilot, and skillful mariner" (125-126). While several critics have noted Cavendish's heavy reliance on the genre of medieval romance, this particular image of a woman in a boat without an active captain being led to safety draws not on romance but on the pseudo-hagiography of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*.²⁸⁵ In *The Man of Law's Tale*,

²⁸⁵ For more about Cavendish's romances, see Victoria Kahn, "Margaret Cavendish and the Romance of

Custance, a Christian princess forced to marry a Saracen, is set adrift in the ocean where the hand of God guides her boat to safety. In both cases, the women are given an extraordinary amount of power in their new living situations.²⁸⁶

The suffering of both women is highlighted in order to liken them to female saints, but the emphasis is truly on God's protection of them and the way that their lives are shown to fit into the cosmic order. In Chaucer's tale, Custance is alone on the boat but seems to be adrift for a much longer period of time:

Yeres and dayes fleet this creature
Thurghout the See of Grece unto the Strayte
Of Marrok, as it was hire aventure.
On many a sory meel now may she bayte;
After hir deeth ful often may she wayte,
Er that the wilde wawes wol hire dryve
Unto the place ther she shal arrive. (463-469)²⁸⁷

Custance is said to be on the boat for years and days without food, longing for death. Her solitude and hunger are her particular torments. For Cavendish's young lady the

Contract." *Renaissance Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (1997): 526-566.

²⁸⁶ For more information on Geoffrey Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*, see Robert B. Dawson, "Custance in Context: Rethinking the Protagonist of the 'Man of Law's Tale.'" *The Chaucer Review* 26, no. 3 (1992): 293-308, Christine F. Cooper, "'But algates therby was she understonde': Translating Custance in Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 36, no. 1 (2006): 27-38, and Helen Cooney, "Wonder and Immanent Justice in the 'Man of Law's Tale.'" *The Chaucer Review* 33, no. 3 (1999): 264-287. Cooper argues, "Chaucer creates a monolingual, Latin-speaking woman whose words are translated into English by means of a miracle usually experienced by medieval saints, the gift of xenoglossia, or the miraculous ability to speak, understand, or be understood in a foreign language that the recipient has never learned formally" (28). Cavendish's Empress also exhibits xenoglossia in her travels to the Blazing World. describes the genre of *The Man of Law's Tale* as a blend between "homiletic romance" because it differs from a hagiography in that the heroine is not martyred and she obtains a stable and happy future and history because "Chaucer's audience would have perceived the story, not as fiction, but as history" (264-265). *The Blazing World* similarly defies definition, but can be said to evoke the "wonder" Cooney describes.

²⁸⁷ Chaucer, *The Man of Law's Tale* in *The Riverside Chaucer*. 3rd Ed. Larry D. Benson, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987).

threatening men around her are her torments until they die and rot on the boat. Then she suffers through the sensory experience of death all around her while she wanders through northern waters. Cavendish draws on this hagiographic tradition of protecting the entirely helpless through miracle. In Chaucer's tale, the narrator explains the import of Custance's survival:

Men myghten asken why she was nat slayn
Eek at the feeste? Who myghte hir body save?
And I answeere to that demande agayn
Who saved Danyel in the horrible cave
Ther every wight save he, maister and knave,
Was with the leon frete er he asterte?
No wight but God that he bar in his herte. (470-476)²⁸⁸

To liken Custance to Daniel in the lions' den is to present her as God's chosen person, but it is also to make her a type of Christ. When Cavendish draws on Chaucer's tale, she associates her young lady with Custance, the saints in the hagiographic tradition, and with God's chosen leaders, like Daniel. The hagiographic literacy of the early modern period indicates that readers would have easily seen these connections and that the leap from saint to Christ would not have been unexpected for them. Citing God's protection is to invoke the idea of providence and to put the heroine's journey above reproach or question. These women who receive inexplicable protection from supernatural forces may also be said to have access to that same power that guides them and keeps them from harm. They are empowered by their position in the cosmic order that places them above ordinary mortals.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

For the Empress, her movement up the spiritual ladder from ordinary mortal to saint to goddess occurs officially when she meets the Emperor of the Blazing World:

No sooner was the Lady brought before the Emperor, but he conceived her to be some goddess, and offered to worship her; which she refused, telling him, (for by that time she had pretty well learned their language) that although she came out of another world, yet was she but a mortal; at which the Emperor rejoicing, made her his wife, and gave her an absolute power to rule and govern all that world as she pleased. But her subjects, who could hardly be persuaded to believe her mortal, tendered her all the veneration and worship due to a deity. (132)

In this case, a mortal woman only referred to as a young lady becomes the beneficiary of miraculous divine intervention in the form of rescuing her from her would be ravisher and guiding her boat through the treacherous North Pole into another world before being made an empress and venerated like a goddess. The Emperor of the Blazing World plays a very small part in the whole of the text in much the same way that God plays a very small part in the Harrowing. The Harrowing of Hell and its Renaissance retellings are the stories of demigods, of the in-between figures who can navigate and influence heaven, earth, and hell. Thus after the initial moment of bestowing power on the Empress, the Emperor disappears and is not heard from again until “The Second Part of The Description of the New Blazing World” where he once again offers little other than a boost for her already formidable power. It is important to note that the Empress is promoted through her association with the saints to a God-like figure. Her full promotion is further emphasized by the spirits’ answer to her question concerning the location of Paradise. The spirits tell her that “Paradise was not in the world she came from, but in that world she lived in at present; and that it was the very same place where she kept her

court, and where her palace stood in the midst of the imperial city” (170). In entering the Blazing World and marrying its ruler, the Empress has become the wife of the highest power in Paradise and governor of all its workings. Though Cavendish continually refers to the Empress as mortal and her powers, especially intellectual powers, as limited, she draws on a tradition from the Christ Knight allegory of the woman wedded to Christ or God and essentially makes her Empress Goddess over all Paradise. Cavendish presents the Empress as a Harrowing Christ-figure, the liminal, magical Christ of the medieval Harrowing texts, by accentuating the stations between the highest powers and the lowest rungs of the social order and showing the lady (a passive victim with no social standing) becoming the Empress (ruler over the entire world of Paradise).

As in *Doctor Faustus*, the use of rhetoric is a particular form of supernatural agency in *The Blazing World*. The Empress uses inquiry rather than juridical rhetoric to insist that the various animal-men in the Blazing World do not claim rights that they do not have, just as Faustus uses questions about the cosmos to upset Mephistopheles by making him explain God’s creation to him. Once the Empress has been promoted, her first act is to call together all the societies and ask them for information. This section is often related to Cavendish’s tenuous relationship with the Royal Society and is one of the most famous in the book.²⁸⁹ The birdmen, bear-men, fish-men, worm-men, ape-men, spider-men, lice-men, magpie-, parrot-, and jackdaw-men all come before the Empress to

²⁸⁹ For a sample of the scholarship about Cavendish’s relationship to the Royal Society see Elizabeth A. Spiller, “Reading through Galileo’s Telescope: Margaret Cavendish and the Experience of Reading.” *Renaissance Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2000): 192-221, Richard Nate, “‘Plain and Vulgarly Express’d’: Margaret Cavendish and the Discourse of the New Science.” *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 19, no. 4 (2001): 403-417, and Mona Narain, “Notorious Celebrity: Margaret Cavendish and the Spectacle of Fame.” *The Journal of the Midwestern Modern Language Association* 42, no. 2 (2009): 69-95.

answer her questions and justify the existence of their societies in a scene that is reminiscent of Faustus's questioning of Mephistopheles because of the readily apparent thirst for knowledge, even knowledge that is forbidden. In both cases, some questions are shut down by the respondents because the questioner has pried into God's private matters. For the Empress, this chastisement comes from the spirits who explain that her questioning borders on presumption: "Natural desire of knowledge," they explain, "is not blameable, so you do not go beyond what your natural reason can comprehend" (178-179). The implication the spirits make is that the Empress has obviously gone beyond what her natural reason can comprehend. The similarities between these scenes suggest that the ambitious person has particular desires of the supernatural world, primary of them is a more total or complete understanding of the cosmic order and how different entities operate within it. Though both Faustus and the Empress end up with a great deal of money and interesting companions, the first desires, the ones that never seem fully satisfied and must be subverted by heavenly or infernal powers, are for knowledge and understanding. Once the Empress has asked questions of all the animal-men in her new empire, she settles down to complete her own work: creating better churches and a cabbala.

Because factionalism and dispute are what create the instability Cavendish sees as causing the Civil Wars and regicide, she portrays these as potentially hellish sins that the Empress must work to prevent. Throughout her conferences with the animal-men, the Empress is concerned for order in her society. She disbands one society and threatens to dissolve others if they threaten the order and stability of her Blazing World. Her one

contribution to the new world, other than the threat of disbanding fractious societies is to concretize and augment the practice of religion. Cavendish implies that the Empress herself is the only one who can think through the issue of religion and head that new religion in the Blazing World:

After the Empress had thus finished the discourses and conferences with the mentioned societies of her virtuosos, she considered by herself the manner of their religion, and finding it very defective, was troubled, that so wise and knowing a people should have no more knowledge of the divine truth; where fore she consulted with her own thoughts, whether it was possible to convert them all to her own religion, and to that end she resolved to build churches, and make also up a congregation of women, whereof she intended to be the head herself. (162)

As mentioned previously, the act of thinking through something is extremely productive for Cavendish: thinking generates, produces, and corrects in her text in a way that collaborative activities like discourse do not at all. This emphasis on the individual imagination is a kind of affective piety or imaginative identification with Christ that we see in the earlier Harrowing texts. Thus the idea that the Empress must think the concept of religion through on her own, having gained knowledge from her societies but not in any way relying on their opinions of religion, is a significant claim to agency. The subtlety with which Cavendish claims this important agency for the Empress shows the dangerous nature of the claim that women should correct the religion of men and that they should head religious societies at all. Yet, here the Empress “considers by herself” and “consults her own thoughts” only, an activity that indicates that this female political leader creates the church on her own. Furthermore, she sets herself up as the head of this church though she couches this seizure of power by explaining that she will be the head

of the church for women rather than all subjects. In this work, Cavendish allows the Empress to counter the claim made by the priests earlier in her visit that “women and children most commonly make disturbance both in church and state” by representing the Empress as having the final and best answers on the question of religion in this new world (135).

Ritual is an important aspect of the Blazing World’s religion. As is generally the case in Cavendish’s text, the thinking the Empress performs on her own leads to tangible, physical changes in the world. In regards to the Blazing World’s religion, the physical changes manifest as new churches that create sensory rather than purely mental experiences in their congregations and that rely on new scientific exploits to create these experiences. This sensory experience that recreates and reimagines a kind of ritual experience of the past but makes it new by associating it with new scientific principles can be viewed as a response to iconoclastic tendencies because it privileges a corporeal experience of religion over an internalized mental one. True and unified faith, Cavendish suggests, requires the full participation of believers in a space that depicts the possible afterlives. The Empress provides opportunity for these religious encounters through the building of two separate chapels: one “an emblem of Hell” and the other “an emblem of Heaven” (164). Thus, though the spirit men explain that “Your savior Christ...has informed you, that there is heaven and hell, but he did not tell you what, nor where they are,” the Empress finds the sensory apprehension of these worlds to be necessary, even central, to the practice of religion in her society (174). Because ardent religious practice involves seeing the miracles of heaven and hell as surrounding the believer, the Empress

seeks out a way to recreate the fires of hell and the light of heaven in the architecture of the chapels themselves. The experiences the Empress's religion creates disperse agency through the populace in the same way that the cycle plays and other works of affective piety because they encourage imaginative identification or rewriting of the biblical narratives or cosmic order as personally relevant.

The Empress's supernatural prowess is further emphasized by her contribution to the Blazing World, which manifests in the form of churches and religion. She literalizes the emblems of heaven and hell for her subjects by surrounding them with the sensory experiences an emblem is only meant to provoke *in the mind* of the reader:

Both the chapels stood upon pillars, just in the middle of a round cloister which was dark as night; neither was there any other light within them, but what came from the fire- and star-stone; and being everywhere open, allowed to all that were within the compass of the cloister, a free prospect into them; besides, they were so artificially contrived, that they did both move in a circle about their own centres, without intermission, contrary ways. (164)

The dark cloister serves as the chaos out of which the Empress creates her heaven and hell. She, in essence, says, "Let there be light," and in this cloister fire-light and star-light make visible her artistry. The association with the words "artificial" and "contrived" may seem to be further denigration of the Empress's power were her work here presented as manipulative. The overall tone of the passage indicates that these words highlight her agency as artistic creator. These are the manifestations of her thoughts about religion, so central to the order of her Blazing World. The Empress imagines the necessary aspects and artfully executes her plans. Practicing the religion of the Blazing World's Empress is

hardly a stark, art-less endeavor; instead, the parishioner is invited to view a mini-cosmos with representations of heaven and hell circling each other on a platform in different directions. The church-going subject is then surrounded by and moving through the cosmic order as she listens to the Empress preach:

In the chapel which was lined with the fire-stone, the Empress preached sermons of terror to the wicked, and told them of the punishments for their sins, to wit, that after this life they should be tormented in an everlasting fire. But in the other chapel lined with the star-stone, she preached sermons of comfort to those that repented of their sins, and were troubled at their own wickedness. (164)

Here we specifically see Cavendish weigh in on the debate over predestination and its effects in the minds and hearts of the believers. Rather than suggest that the attendees of the first chapel are entirely reprobate or that the attendees of the second are experiencing the “sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort” described by the article, the Empress’s subjects are both literally and metaphorically cycling through these emotions as they participate in this religious experience. The Empress evokes these emotions both with the architectural design of her chapels and with the words of her sermons, which are specifically meant to push the wicked toward discomfort with their sins so that they can then be comforted by the promises of the heavenly chapel. Cavendish suggests that the heat that is present in this religious experience is designed to frighten or comfort the people within the chapel. These sensory experiences allow the believers to engage with the religion more fully, creating a personal investment that will engender loyalty and faith.

In this creation of a new religion in the Blazing World, the Empress crosses the boundaries in the trinity, seeing herself as the Father/Creator, the Son/Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit, or bringer of emotion. She reimagines the human relationship to the cosmos and how the church participates in that by creating an all-encompassing religious experience that engages all the senses of the believer. The end result of the Empress's contribution to the Blazing World is complete peace and order within her domain. The building of the churches that was a natural manifestation of her thinking through the problem of religion in her new world now naturally results in the perfect fulfillment of her philosophy concerning society:

And thus the Empress, by art, and her own ingenuity, did not only convert the Blazing World to her own religion, but kept them in a constant belief, without enforcement or blood-shed; for she knew well, that belief was a thing not to be forced or pressed upon the people, but to be instilled into their minds by gentle persuasions; and after this manner she encouraged them also in all other duties and employments, for fear, though it makes people obey, yet does it not last so long, nor is it so sure a means to keep them to their duties, as love. (164)

Once again Cavendish emphasizes the agency of the Empress in creating the order and peace in this world. Though the early mentions of creating churches and preaching involve only female parishioners, the final result is a genderless "people" who obey the Empress and all her commands because they love her. In essence, where Cavendish was initially careful to argue that a woman preacher would only preach and convert women to obedience to her, she ends by assuming that all the people in the Blazing World would benefit from and be subject to her own religious beliefs. The philosophy that the Empress enacts in her perfect world is a reflection of the change in motivations between the Old

and New Testaments reconciled by the figure of Christ and the renegotiated by the Harrowing. The Empress keeps her subjects obedient through love and not through fear in the same way that Christ ignites the loyalty and devotion of believers through sacrifice and love rather than through punishment and fear. In addition to her references to the Bible and the central tenets of Christianity, Cavendish here rebukes the extreme Protestants who would wage war over their faith rather than convince others to believe with them. Rather than being in any way ancillary to the governing of society or the maintenance of social order, religious belief is central and foundational for a peaceful realm. Without ever explicitly stating her typology, Cavendish creates this religion and the social order by subtly connecting her protagonist to a variety of religious figures: saints, mystics, Christ, and even God the creator. This underlying typological connection imbues the Empress with the power that is necessary for her to create and govern new worlds. Cavendish makes it clear that what is necessary is not only a military power (discussed further below) but a supernatural power and wisdom that is cultivated only through association with religion and spirits.

Active Faith, Using Science to Harrow Hell

In the previous section, we can see the emphasis on creation of worlds and of institutions within worlds as in the Creation of the Bible. Like Christ, the Empress renegotiates the relationship of believers to the cosmic order by creating sensory religious experiences that engender love rather than subservience or fear. As we have seen in Chapter 1, the typology connects the Harrowing to the Last Judgment by focusing on the

central characters of God, mankind, Satan, and Christ in the medieval Harrowing texts. The cycle plays often presented visual similarities, in addition to the similarities in main characters, in the settings of Lucifer's fall from heaven, the Harrowing of Hell, and the Last Judgment; the fire, smoke, and disorganized demons running around connected the three plays. Bernard's and Allen's arguments about Christ's descent into hell also connect the Harrowing to the Last Judgment by suggesting that Christ's descent and return is a foreshadowing of what will happen for all humans at the end of time. In this final section, I analyze how the Empress Christ-figure uses military conquest and technology to rid her homeland from the evils of unjust war by drawing on these typological connections. The Empress's return to her own world is like a final judgment because Cavendish has set up the world adjacent to the Blazing World as inferior and hellish from the start. It is the place where rapes occur, where just men are stripped of their land and goods, and where factious, dangerous things take place.

When the Empress reaches out to the king of the land from which she came, her world shows further similarities to the hells of the Mystery Cycles in that the leaders are comically unintelligent and incompetent. Her first appearance confounds them, but the letter she sends begins a council that frustrates the Empress with its stupidity. Finally, the leaders of her old home send a message asking who she is. The Empress replies, "She was not bound to tell them whence she came; but as for the manner of her assistance, I will appear, said she, to your navy in a splendid light, surrounded with fire" (209). Her message to the people of her former nation is also similar to Jesus's (and Paulina's metaphorical) entry into hell. Christ and his figures bring a great light into darkness.

Darkness in Shakespeare and Cavendish is not necessarily a place of torment and torture, but it is a place of misrule and chaos. Hell, for Cavendish, seems to be a place where the social order is not preserved and monarchs do not perform their appropriate duties.

Though neither Paulina nor the Empress actually serve as monarch in this world, they both serve the interests of reasserting or maintaining the monarchy and its hold on absolute power and rule. Directly after the Empress finishes her religious contribution to the Blazing World, she begins to consider again the world from which she came and how she can bring peace and order to that world as well. Cavendish writes:

Last of all, when she saw that both church and state was now in a well-ordered and settled condition, her thoughts reflected upon the world she came from; and though she had a great desire to know the condition of the same, yet could she advise no manner of way how to gain any knowledge thereof; at last, after many serious considerations, she conceived that it was impossible to be done by any other means, than by the help of immaterial spirits. (164-165)

At this point in the text, the desire to know about her own world leads to another physical manifestation of thought. In this case, the Empress and the Duchess learn to leave their bodies behind and travel in spirit only to visit their own world. It is important to note the clear connection between the powers of Cavendish's Empress and the powers of Christ as explained by Allen above. For Allen, the magic or science of the Harrowing is Christ's ability to descend in soul and give comfort to the bodies of the dead that they will one day rise and become once again whole and uncorrupted. At the Last Judgment, this is exactly what Christ's role will be—to reunite the souls and bodies of the Elect so that they may enter into Paradise whole and uncorrupted as he did. When the Empress and her

scribe decide to visit their own world, they choose to harness similar powers. They leave their bodies and travel only in the form of immaterial spirits.

Cavendish uses her same thoughtful action to find solutions to the problems in her homeland. In “The Second Part of the Description of the New Blazing World,” the Empress discovers that the kingdom from which she came is under attack. The immaterial spirits tell her:

The world she came from, was embroiled in a great war, and that most parts or nations thereof made war against that kingdom, which was her native country, where all her friends and relations did live. (203)

The Empress’s discovery through the immaterial spirits that her world is threatened by outside forces sets up an opportunity for her to perform a Harrowing. She immediately begins to think through how she can save her world from the invading forces. The Emperor offers the idea of creating a zombie army, which brings the issue directly back to the body and the soul and how the two may part and return to one another. The problem with zombie armies is, of course, that bodies decay and disintegrate: “there is one obstruction or hindrance which can no ways be avoided...they would stink and dissolve” (204). Even if some method could be devised for avoiding corruption (as Christ did when he died and left his body), the bodies would not submit to being taken over by immaterial spirits: “yet the souls of such bodies would not suffer immaterial spirits to rule and order them, but they would enter and govern them themselves, as being the right owners thereof” (204). The first possible solution to the disordered state in the Empress’s world shows immediate thematic similarities to the debate over Christ’s descent because

its focus is on the separation of the body and the soul. The Empress and Emperor find that the logical limitations of death initially stymie them in their attempts to attack and subdue a world adjacent to their own, but as is the case for Cavendish, serious thought and scientific ingenuity find ways for the Empress to “show the greatness of her love and affection which she bore to her native country” just as Christ shows his love to the departed souls in the Harrowing (205).

While military conquest generally involves an army, Christ’s defeat of hell in the Harrowing is done alone and through disguise and trickery. Instead of bringing an army into the world, the Duchess helps the Empress discover a method in which she can defend her kingdom from their invaders virtually single-handedly, “and in a manner become mistress of all that world” (206). However, this plan requires that the Empress go into her old world in both body and soul unlike her previous trip as an immaterial spirit:

When the ships were made ready, the Duchess told the Empress, that it was requisite that Her Majesty should go her self in body as well as in soul; but, I, said she, can only wait on Your Majesty after a spiritual manner, that is, with my soul. Your soul, said the Empress, shall live with my soul, in my body; for I shall only desire your counsel and advice. (206)

In this brief passage, Cavendish weighs-in on the debate about whether or not Christ descends in body or soul or both to harrow hell. Whereas, in the earlier texts, this was of crucial importance and signaled a move away from physical religious practice and belief to internalized, contemplative practice, Cavendish follows Bernard and Allen in assuming that Christ is such a powerful agent that bringing his body with his soul is not a significant problem, instead the sacrifice is more important. Showing her love for the

ruler and people of the world from which she came requires that the Empress return to that world in both body and soul to demonstrate her power. Lee Cullen Khanna has explained that Cavendish's work in *The Blazing World* has democratizing tendencies because it insists that even ruling power can be continually generative.

The locus of utopian desire for Cavendish is discursive power and a continuous generativity. Inextricable from this achievement as Margaret the First, however, is the figuring of a relational self: the ruler who invites 'subjects' into her utopian world; the friend who rushes to subvert any potential threat to the Empress of the Blazing World.²⁹⁰

Khanna's idea of a relational self is similar to the Christ that is both agent and object, but is significantly female and sees the production of community and order as more collaborative. Cavendish presents a militarily powerful female monarch as multiple and more powerful for being of two (or more) minds, spirits, and bodies. She feminizes the idea of the Harrowing not just by making her Christ-figure female but by making her methods significantly different from the traditional ideas of kingship and military power. The Empress not only plans to harrow her homeland militarily but she becomes a reimagining of Christ's carrying souls up from hell *within* his body. She will have her own body and soul and the soul of the Duchess of Newcastle within her when she will go to save her world and her people. She not only presents herself as a deity but also as one bearing so much love she must save her old world from their chaos and rebelliousness.

²⁹⁰ Lee Cullen Khanna, "The Subject of Utopia: Margaret Cavendish and Her Blazing World." *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference* (1994): 15-34, 33.

A figure of Christ would not secure power for his or her own sake but serves both a greater power and the lesser beings on whose behalf he or she appears. Cavendish explicitly creates her Empress as serving this sort of function. The Empress writes a letter to her countrymen explaining her purpose in attacking their enemies on their behalf and what she asks in return. In the letter, she writes:

I come not to make bargains with you, or to regard my own interest, more than your safety; but I intend to make you the most powerful nation of this world; and therefore I have chosen rather to quit my own tranquility, riches and pleasure, than suffer you to be ruined and destroyed. All the return I desire, is but your grateful acknowledgement, and to declare my power, love and loyalty to my native country; for although I am now a great and absolute princess and empress of a whole world, yet I acknowledge that once I was a subject of this kingdom.
(210)

The Empress receives nothing in return for giving the monarch of her kingdom absolute power over the world except the assurance that the world will be governed well. As is the case for deities, however, she asks for acknowledgement and gratitude for the help she provides. Her movement between worlds and up the ladder of sainthood to demi-god is also returned as a reason for her sentimentality for the other world just as Christ's time as man is intended to forge bonds between man and God. The fact that the Empress uses her power to make for her former monarch a secure place as leader of the whole world shows her dedication to the social order from which she comes, but it also shows that this social order is highly dependent upon the power of the other societal structures, especially religion, science, and magic. In *The Blazing World*, the Duchess styles herself as especially important in creating and maintaining all of these other social structures.

The Empress here becomes a militaristic figure of Christ who is defeating the enemies of disorder and chaos. It is through the reasoning of the Duchess of Newcastle that the Empress discovers the way to defeat the invaders: she must go without an army and destroy the invading ships with the use of fire-stone and submarines. The fact that this militaristic feat is achieved through the use of science and performance only makes it more like the harrowing in which Christ descends to defeat Satan through trickery. The Empress, like Christ, beguiles the beguilers by using trickery to keep them from holding on to what is not theirs. The men who have invaded the country from which the Empress came are unlawfully imposing their rule and order on the rightful king, and the Empress is willing to use theatricality and trickery in order to keep them from doing that. The fire-stone and the fish-men allow the Empress to appear as a god on the water who creates fire all around her, but she is also actually walking on the water surrounded by fire and sinking the ships of the enemy:

The appointed hour being come, the Empress appeared with garments made of the star-stone, and was born or supported above the water, upon the fish-men's heads or backs, so that she seemed to walk upon the face of the water, and the bird- and fish-men carried the fire-stone, lighted both in the air, and above the waters (210).

The association with theatricality makes this harrowing no less effective within the logic of Cavendish's narrative. This scene is a perfect example of the ways in which the Harrowing narratives and the reinterpretations of the Harrowing are a nexus for religious and scientific discourses. Cavendish exposes the machinery behind "walking on water," but this does not make the feat less miraculous. In the case of this fantasy world, the idea

that the cooperative, *talking* fish carry the Empress cannot really be said to be more scientific or less magical than Christ's walking on water without the aid of talking fish. When we look at this scene from this perspective, we may begin to understand the interrelatedness of the discourses for the early modern subject. The mechanics of science may have been perceived as magic in a way that we can hardly imagine them to be now.

The Empress will at least give the impression of the Last Judgment if not actually create the situations of Revelations in her former world, and the important part is that the effect will be the same: order will be restored. The association with the apocalypse and the Last Judgment show intense similarities with the debates over Christ's descent. As has been discussed throughout this dissertation, the Harrowing is the typological ancestor of both the creation and the final judgment of the world. Christ's involvement in the Fall as its implicit answer and only solution is manifested in the Harrowing when he goes into hell to save Adam and Eve from Satan. Furthermore, this Harrowing prefigures the Last Judgment when Christ will come again and defeat Satan for all eternity and, in the case of the seventeenth-century Church of England theologians, unite the bodies of the dead with their souls which have been in heaven. Cavendish draws on this tradition in this scene in *The Blazing World*. This is not simply a metaphorical association. Cavendish creates an Empress who intends to call to mind the end of days with her attack:

The fish-men should carry [the fire-stones] likewise, and hold them out of the water; for they were cut in the form of torches or candles, and being many thousands, made a terrible show; for it appeared as if all the air and sea had been of a flaming fire; and all that were upon the sea, or near it, did verily believe, the time of judgment, or the last day was come, which made them all fall down, and pray. (208)

The “terrible show” makes things “appear” as they do in “the time of judgment,” but it also effects the necessary response in the watchers: they “verily believe” and “fall down, and pray.” At the opening of this Harrowing it becomes clear that the line between theatricality and ritual is indistinguishable or non-existent and the powerful spectacle is only enhanced through the use of science or magic. The fish-men and the scientific fire-stones are like Christ’s divinity that is the “hook” hiding under the Empress’s miraculous walking on water which is like the “bait” of Christ’s humanity as was discussed in the second chapter. In one case, the “hook” is clearly supernatural, but as mentioned above, the talking fish and the fire-stones are no more likely to have been empirically observed in Cavendish’s day than they are in ours. The “imaginative” status of both elements can be considered supernatural or magical. Cavendish is careful to couch her terms, but for the Empress, the end result is the same: the attackers of the world she enters venerate her like a god and she is able to subdue them to obey the king of her former abode. This scene interrogates the epistemological differences between faith and science in ways that suggest we should reconsider our historical narrative.

The Blazing World is a late-seventeenth century retelling of Christ’s Harrowing of Hell that features a female Christ-figure, the Empress, who is promoted through pseudo-hagiography and typology to become recreator of the social orders of both the Blazing World and her homeland. Cavendish engages with the ideas presented in theological debates written by Richard Bernard and William Allen about Christ’s descent into hell by showing how Christ is a scientist whose vast understanding of and control over natural

philosophy allows him to help mankind through any possible obstacle. This benevolent and intelligent Christ is the model for Cavendish's female Christ. This Christ, the Empress, harrows her new and old worlds of political instability through imaginative ritualization that allows her to find the authority to end disputes between scientific communities that threaten consensus and productive communication, travel between worlds in body and soul, and militarily defeat naval forces through the technology of firestones and biological transportation. This reimagining of the harrowing is similar to Marlowe's and Shakespeare's in that it features a powerful Christ-figure who relies on human agency to intervene in the supernatural realms and in the world as they know it, and Cavendish adds to this science as a particularly masterful human agency over the natural and supernatural worlds.

We began this dissertation with Karl Tamburr's claim that the Harrowing of Hell disappears by the end of the sixteenth century because the theology and literary elements become easier to dismiss. The exploration of these four early modern texts show that this is not the case; the Harrowing remains relevant throughout the period, and this relevance is not limited to the influence of the medieval theater on the Renaissance theater or the classical and medieval epics and allegory on the early modern epic and allegory. Nor was the theology of the Harrowing the focus of a particular monarch. Through genres and dynastic lines, the Harrowing of Hell expanded and changed shape in order to be relevant to the philosophical ideas of these two centuries. Continuing to acknowledge this doctrine and the literary tradition it spawned gives us the opportunity to revise our understanding of how early modern people conceived of the supernatural, magic, ritual, agency,

religious belief, and science. These reexaminations, in turn, help us to complicate the overly simple teleological narrative of modernism that indicates that magic and fervently sensual religious belief disappear as rationalism and scientific inquiry appropriately disenchant the western world. The Harrowing of Hell that emerges from the Middle Ages offers us a different and more liminal Christ than other traditions, and this magical Christ transforms throughout the centuries to become an ideal of human power over the diabolic and the unnatural. The human agencies that give mankind the opportunity to confront and defeat evil in this world and in other worlds change over time, but they do not become less miraculous or less magical. To harrow hell or Sicilia or the Blazing World or England from evil is still to align oneself with higher powers in a way that reinforces belief in the cosmic order.

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